

Keynote talk

Understanding LGBTQ+ experiences as part of our Church

- Jesus & John the Baptist (Matthew 11)
 - o Jesus asking “What did you go out in the wilderness to see?” (Matthew 11:7)
 - We look for answers on how to help our youth but often end up being like the “children sitting in marketplaces calling out to others” (Matthew 11:16)
- LGBTQ+ lives are not an abstract concept—we are talking about our own communities and talking about us
 - o NCYC conference anonymous statement box
 - Had teens complete the phrase “I am _____” at NCYC and turn them in to a box
 - 8-10% said something about their LGBTQ experience
- Christians take different sides on LGBTQ+ teachings
 - o Side A—those who think Church teaching should be challenged
 - o Side B—those who uphold teaching but embrace all (FOCUS ON SIDE B AS MINISTERS)
- We are all called to ask the question, “How do I pursue holiness?”
 - o That’s what it comes down to
- If you think “we don’t have gay people in our community,” you just don’t know they yet
 - o Sometimes they feel like they won’t feel seen
- Tony use to use this question as part of the Confirmation interview: Do you have a stumbling block that makes it hard to be Catholic?
 - o Most frequently, teens are now bring up the Church’s teachings on LGBTQ+

Identifying the actual teaching the Church has about LGBTQ+

- Look to the Catechism Section 3 about Life in Christ for Church teaching to be on the same page
- Things to note about teaching in Catechism:
 - o The Church has no specific teaching on why people experience same-sex attraction
 - o We must be mindful of how we walk through the wording (language is 30+ years old and uses words like “depravity” and “in their condition”)
 - Use of word disordered—not meant like “disorder” as in a malady or sickness
 - Instead “disorder” as in falls outside of the natural order of procreative impulse
 - o There is no significant section that deals with gender or gender identity
- CCC 2358—emphasis on treating those with LGBTQ+ experiences with “respect, compassion, and sensitivity”
 - o We are bad at this frequently on this part of the teaching as an institution

Panel Questions for Mary Lawrence, Deacon Paul, and Simone

Mary Lawrence—devout Catholic and active member in her parish, experiences same-sex attraction, married to her partner

Deacon Paul—permanent deacon whose daughter is bisexual

Simone—youth minister who has run a successful LGBTQ+ night at her parish

Question 1 for the group: How do you help kids know they are safe?

- Say it, say it repeatedly, and do the work
- Safety is a multi-layered problem—there are people you feel safe with and people you don't
 - o It's not just about making a "safe space"—it's being safe people to be with
- Explore how your team feels so you can be aware of how the message could be perceived
 - o No one is surprised or speaking against Church teaching
- Safety is relative—some people say they are allies until it is their own child
- Sin is sin—sexual sin is not the "highest sin"
 - o Puritanical roots of US sometimes elevate sexual sin to feel like the "highest sin" when it doesn't need to be the biggest conversation

Question 2 for Mary Lawrence: How did you choose to stay Catholic and in a parish?

- "I can't be un-Catholic"
 - o Day to day life is hard but faith drives you
- Similar conversations were held not long ago with those who were divorced and other marginalized communities
- "Do not let a human being interfere with your relationship with Christ"

Question 3 for the group: How do we start a conversation with someone who struggles with gender?

- Our anatomy is not how we are made in God's image and likeness—our soul is
 - o Physical changes don't specifically make you less "you"
 - Ex. losing an arm or hand doesn't take away who you are
 - o Being trans is about substance, like the Eucharist

Question 4 for the group: What could the pastoral practice be for a volunteer to be in a same-sex relationship?

- It is unjust to apply scrutiny to those whose lives we think we know when we aren't necessarily asking the same questions of others (ex. not asking if volunteers use contraception)
- Always find the right position for volunteers

Question 5 for the group: How can I help my child who is scared they are going to be judged at school for being Catholic and "hating gay people"?

- As parents, try to be the "loudest voice" in your child's ears
- All children will have to face peer judgement—be there to support them as they discern what to do
 - o Are we teaching discernment as a life skill in our ministries or as parents?
 - There is a culture around exploring now, just as there has always been with adolescents

Question 6 for the group: What is the difference between support compassion and endorsement

- We can only do what our conscience tells us
 - o We don't all agree, but we are in conversation
- Always check with your pastor on what you can do
- Are we praying that our LGBT community members feel welcome and loved?
 - o Do we make it clear in our parish—ex. prayers of the faithful

Other notes:

- Always have a pastoral plan (<https://www.archbalt.org/help-is-here/>)
 - o Mental health resources for teens
- Eden Invitation (<https://www.edeninvitation.com/resources>)
 - o Community for LGBTQ+ young adults with excellent resources
- Fr. Matt Buening as contact for LGBTQ+ in the Archdiocese

Small group table discussion questions:

- Why are these conversations so hard? What do we need to work through as youth ministers to be able to have the conversations we need to have?
- We have our own problems as well—how do we be empathetic without affirming behavior that goes against the Church?
- How do we ourselves struggle?
- How do we need to get over ourselves in order to minister to others?