

Feedback—excerpts—Concerning 2006 U.S. Bishops' Document: "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care"

Responses--strong, sad, hopeful—to the Fortunate Families November 16, 2006 email message to newsletter email subscribers. Compiled by Casey Lopata. Also included in November, 2006 Fortunate Families newsletter.

- How dare they be so evil in the name of a Gospel of Love!!!
- I am concerned by the tone of recent mailings from Fortunate Families concerning your protests of the Bishops letter. What is wrong with the "Courage Approach" to our family members who are homosexual? Their approach is to support their efforts to live in chastity, the same way all baptized Catholics must live. We must all struggle with living in chastity according to our state in life, and a homosexual orientation does not offer an exception.
- You are far more charitable toward the Bishops than they are toward gays, lesbians, their families and friends.
- I find a more suitable title for the (un)pastoral letter could have been "We Love You Unconditionally; Now Change."
- Two years ago, while taking to my Bishop, a member of the Committee writing the paper, I offered to get some knowledgeable and faithful Catholic gays, lesbians and those who minister to them to meet with him and any other committee members. He never contacted me, and I was left with the belief that they didn't want a genuinely honest pastoral approach to ministry to those with a "homosexual inclination", but rather to advocate the official position in a more compassionate manner, maybe to advance their own careers!
- While I acknowledge the hurtful aspects of the language (inclination is my least favorite dirty word), I must look beyond the bureaucratic "boiler-plate" that invariably accompanies this sort of announcement. There are still reasons to be hopeful. The flawed individuals through whom God speaks on "official" matters of the church are NOT the CHURCH. They are but the hierarchy, many of them out of touch and defensive. To put the issue in perspective, the guidelines were considered along with the war in Iraq, stem-cell research and a couple of other hot-button items. THAT is an indication to me that:
 - It is very important
 - They are going to have to deal with it. As James Alison said, "It's all over but the shouting."
 - Other people can now criticize or "fold, staple or mutilate" whatever they come up with
 - Papa Ratz is watching
 - The Church started as "house churches"...we may have to go back to our roots, but we cannot stop doing what we're doing.
- It's hard to believe the Bishops approved this document!!! Let us not become discouraged. The people of God are so much more accepting and that is where we must get our courage and our hope.
- They don't ascribe to gay parents adopting, but the church can baptize their children. I suspect they don't want us to receive Eucharist, but how they will know who is "chaste"? And then there is the theology on chastity according to one's state, all based on natural law, but Thomas used homosexuality to illustrate the point that what is natural for some is not natural for all. Part of me wants to send each a copy... then I say why bother, they would say but it is traditional teaching. Not to worry that the first premises were ill informed.
- People want to hear what the church is doing to prevent our children from being harmed from predators, and what good deeds the Catholic Church is doing. I perceive all this as a smoke screen to avert people from addressing the real issues and how effective the leadership is. The

church can learn from what just happened in politics, that eventually using gay people as a scapegoat wears off. The church needs a new marketing campaign! Stop the blame game. Let's talk about a loving and inclusive God.

- I take hope in the changing opinions of Catholics in the pews. If only they can stay long enough for this nightmare of reactionary thinking among the bishops and Vatican to pass.
- The USCCB has almost painted itself into a corner where such a position was inevitable—from pedophilia scandals, gay marriage issues, seminary inquisitions - this is only a next logical step.
- NPR reported that, in addition to this document, the USCCB was reaffirming "Church Teaching" on artificial means of contraception, [saying] only about 4% of Catholics are in compliance. The USCCB also reaffirmed the importance of Holy Eucharist—and that it should only be given to the 'worthy' (don't we all pray each service, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you"?)—those who are living lives consistent with "Church Teaching". I concluded only 4% of Catholics should be receiving the Eucharist. Priest Shortage Solved! Then I wondered, of those 4%, how many are gay/lesbian—pretty effective contraception in most cases!

- This 'church' is moving even farther away from Jesus - who sought the marginalized, touched the lepers, made object lessons from the despised Samaritans while chastising, rebuking, scorning the hypocrisy of organized religion and self-important leaders of his day.



- Although the document will cause further division, misunderstanding and hurt—and could possibly result in a society where discrimination dissolves into abuse (including endorsement of reparative therapy)—my deepest sadness comes from the pervasive feeling of "we're in, you're out—but we love you anyway."
- It's so very easy to take these statements on a personal level but in the broader context, it tells us much more about the American bishops than about the GLBT faithful.
- We want to and probably will stay with the church—but at what point do we 'unhook' from the organized religious structures and move to the margins? How do we find/create the true church? The American bishops moved from the "Gospel Edges" to a 'circle the wagon', fear-based mentality.
- That they wouldn't talk with any GLBT Catholic or ministry is astonishing. Jesus was a great one for dialogue—he seemed to enjoy the conversation, loving those who talked with him. At this point, I feel a strong identification with the Syro-Phoenician woman—"But Lord, don't even the dogs get the crumbs under the table?"
- Gay and lesbian Catholics cannot expect any realistic ministry from the magisterium in the near future; they will find it where they always have, in parishes, religious communities, campuses and groups like yours. I think it is also an attempt to undermine diocesan ministries, sadly.
- On the very day this was issued, my Pastor gave me permission to begin Gay and Lesbian Ministry at our parish. Father was very supportive. I left with the feeling that this was important to him and he was glad I was willing to do it.
- I am very close to severing my relationship with the Catholic Church. After 30 years of dedicating my life to bridging the gap between Church hierarchy and the lgbt person in the pew I am weary of the lunacy I see in Church authority.
- While the final document is not terribly encouraging, and contains the oddest language and phrasing, I still find the situation hopeful. Notice the document is written with several obvious 'voices.' The terminology changes, the stern voice speaks, and then is tempered. I think the Bishops could not come to a consensus. Look at the NCS article: you see 'highly amended, wanted to send back to committee, lively debate, they were only willing to 'footnote' Courage.' And there were 37 Bishops who publicly voted against this document. The document says we

have no business "in the ministry" if we can't get on board with the document. That would include the company of 37 very good men who also have problems with it. *[Editor's note: it was a secret ballot—we don't know who voted against it, or why].* With the weighty issues on the Bishops agenda at this conference, I am pleased we got the attention we did. They are working on it, and on their brothers, and I find that hopeful. While my son will not be comforted in the message or language of this document, I will try to remind him that "it" like the "very soul of the church" is a work in progress. My ministry will be to continue to try to make everyone welcome in MY CHURCH, and at my table. Even the Bishops agreed with that!! Keep up the fight, I really believe this too will pass.

- The bishops never seem to learn, do they? I can only suppose they were warned (diplomatically, of course) not to discuss the document with anyone who might know something about the subject.
- We love our children and that is the bottom line...it certainly goes beyond their bureaucratic maneuvering for whatever their reasons. I truly believe the Holy Spirit has control and it will turn out for the best.
- My initial reaction to the three documents related to sexuality and the Eucharist is, indeed, this might be the event that causes me to walk away from the Church that's been central to my life for all of my 56 years. I need to take a deep breath, maybe talk to my pastor, gauge my archbishop's follow-through, and pray of course. But when reception of the Eucharist is tagged onto their judgment of what we do in bed, it goes to the heart, and gut.
- The so-called new document is same old/same old; and ongoing proof that they still don't/won't 'get it.' Until there is a transformation of our system of moral thought that is based upon ancient and medieval thinking, we're stuck in this twilight zone of no credibility when our religious leaders speak on moral issues.
- My sorrow and "just anger" are strong—we cannot be silent.
- Such uneducated, stubborn Bishops.
- This Thanksgiving I will give thanks for my son—and for people who inspire and encourage.
- We are praying for Wisdom to visit us and to penetrate the hearts and minds of the leaders of the Church. We believe the Holy Spirit cannot be denied, but it is difficult to watch and wait until the time is right, God's time. Our children have become disillusioned. Understandable, but no less painful.
- I find it harder and harder to even want to organize and work towards more understanding. I will continue to pray that the Holy Spirit will lead me into the next step of my work in the Church.
- I could barely read through the document without constantly shaking my head NO! to the inconsistencies and poorly written text. I am sure some hack at the Vatican wrote this and forwarded it to the USCCB to rubber stamp. I don't think this document could get a passing grade in most seminaries.
- What can I say? The Church is incorrigible.
- I don't believe much will happen until the gay priests ultimately decide they have had enough of being called "disordered" and begin the real work of banding together and forcing the Vatican to retract such harmful language.
- I am not sure what to do other than cry for our bishops and the total lack of courage and leadership on their part.
- Unfortunately, I think it's time for me to move on. Do you think Jesus would have made a declaration about people without consulting with them? It's beyond absurd.



Total disconnect. There's nothing left from what I can see. I can return when the church changes. (I can't even capitalize the C anymore)

- This newest assault is the "last straw" after fighting the ignorance and hypocrisy of the hierarchy from the Vatican on down for over thirty years. I have long been an advocate of remaining within the church and sacrificing all in the hope of awakening our leadership to the scandalous treatment of gays and lesbians. Being made to feel unwelcome was tolerable when no specific documents were put in place. Rays of hope did occur with "Always Our Children," however this has been some kind of cruel joke. The treatment of women has occasioned the vocation crisis, coupled with the fact that few men wish to be associated with the cover-up and callous disregard for the victims of clergy sex abuse. The offending priests deserve far less censure than the bishops, cardinals, and the papal offices who prevent prosecution, and compensation of the victims. I belonged to DIGNITY and I am finding it impossible to believe they can create any change. New Ways Ministry is, likewise, impotent in its lobbying power. I have grown weary of "closeted" clergy. Do I remain in selective parishes which are accepting mostly in the degree that they say nothing negative from the pulpit? It is sad when a meeting of bishops takes time and energy to address "issues" such as who is allowed to purify the sacred vessels used at Mass—who practices birth control—and who should be excluded from the Communion Table. I regret that this day has arrived, and I may still be so indoctrinated that I will not act of my anger at the moment. In good conscience and good faith, why do we think we can cling to a church which clearly announces it doesn't want us? The concept of inclusiveness has died, and we can do very little to revive it.

- You are so very correct about the value of "experience". Perhaps we need to do it one Bishop at a time! Until we get rid of the awful language "objectively disordered" and making terrible comparisons, nothing will happen. I'm hoping we can harness the energy ... to make our voices heard! Let us, in the meantime, continue to love and offer unconditional love.

- Disconnecting a person from his/her humanity and imposing on the individual the responsibility to become acceptable, releases those in power from being welcoming of those who will disturb their comfort zone.

- I find great hope that they seem to be linking this position to their position on the rhythm method. Heterosexual Catholics now know that [position] isn't something they can follow. They may begin to realize that these guys generally aren't informed teachers on sexuality. As more and more people get more comfortable with gay people, even though they want "marriage" reserved for heterosexuals, many seem to be fine with unions. In the last 30 years there really has been a lot of social progress on this issue. Fast enough... no. But people of color still aren't equal, and women still aren't equal... and justice requires we keep fighting.

- Let the bishops be outrageous.... it will help sensible people realize faster what homophobia is and how irrational it is.

- It is very troubling, tedious and tiring to be subjected to the repeated insults of the hierarchy. They diminish their voice in other areas when they speak with discrimination. I wish I could say that they did NOT have some influence with so many families including my own. It's one thing for me to be dismissive of their uninformed and unenlightened view but it's quite another to deal with the everyday discrimination of Catholics who strive to honor, respect and uphold the views of the teachers of our Catholic doctrine. The bishops can poison the waters with their pen in a nanosecond. It's a terrible abuse of their influence and power to impose this document on the faithful without consulting the lived experience of the GLBT community.



- We have to continue to “speak the truth to power,” asking the Bishops to explain FULLY what this document means. E.g.: Aren’t you really saying to millions of homosexual persons that they

must be celibate all their lives? If that is so, since this state of celibacy for homosexual persons is not freely chosen, what is the value?

- The Bishops speak of the great value of friendship. Are the Bishops willing to formally bless or recognize in any way a committed friendship between two persons of the same sex?

- Rather than disparage, I'm looking at the few nuggets of truth I can work with. I find the clause relative to a 'complaint'/grievance procedure very hopeful. This can be an avenue to providing the kind of real world education our bishops need about human relationships in general, and how it pertains to lesbian and gay Catholics. I find the section urging 'training' extremely hopeful. I will focus on the things that I can have an impact on, and pray on the rest.

- This latest instruction is still a reaction (over-reaction) to the abuse scandal. Our sons and daughters are considered "collateral damage" in their pursuit of the "party line." I think they are guilty of abuse of our children.