



Courage & EnCourage
228 North Walnut Street
Lansing, Michigan 48933-1122
517-342-2596
Facsimile: 517.342.2468
caverart@comcast.net

ENCOURAGE SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Roman Catholic Diocese of Lansing Chapter

When: Sunday August 19, 2012 from 2:30 to 4:00pm

**Where: Holy Spirit Catholic Church
9565 Musch Rd.
Brighton, Michigan 48116**

Directions: US-23 to Silver Lake Rd. Exit (exit #55) West on Silver Lake Rd. to Whitmore Lake Rd. (a short distance). South on Whitmore Lake Rd. to Winans Lake Rd.(a three way stop). West on Winans Lake Rd. approximately one mile to entrance marked with a sign for Holy Spirit Cemetery and Holy Spirit Rectory and School. Turn left. We meet in portable classroom number four. Look for Encourage Meeting signs.

It has been almost two months since our last meeting. We did not meet in July because of our attendance at the Annual Courage and EnCourage Conference. As always, the conference was a spiritually enriching experience. "Thank you" to those who attended our workshop, to those who shared their stories, and to those who generously donated to help off set the cost of materials. Many expressed to us their appreciation of the testimonies shared and for the opportunity of parents of sons to meet with Courage men, and parents of daughters to meet with Courage women. This will be repeated next year. We would urge you to make plans to attend next year's conference at the University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein, IL. It is a blessing that you will always treasure. The talks at every conference are always recorded and are available in both DVD and audio forms. Check the Courage website at www.couragerc.org for a list of talks and ordering information. As of this writing, Courage has not yet posted the 2012 conference talks, but we have been assured, that they will soon be available.

We have enclosed two articles that we think are particularly insightful. Fr. Paul Check, the Director of Courage and EnCourage, responds to the question, *Does The Church Hate Persons With Same-Sex Attraction?* This is a question and /or an accusation frequently leveled at the church because she has always taught the truth about same-sex attraction as revealed in sacred scripture and tradition, As we all know, the truth is frequently counter cultural.

The second enclosure is from the publication First Things and is written by a Courage member who deals with the issue of identity. Can a Christian self identify as 'gay'? This is a question and an issue that many members of Courage struggle to resolve in their lives as do many loved ones in their efforts to understand the issue.

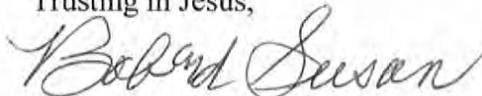
Remember please that we unite to pray each Thursday to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in reparation for our sins and the sins against human sexuality such as same-sex behavior and abortion. Reparation is making amends for the wrongs committed through our sinful condition. Additionally, we pray as intercessors for all our loved ones who will, like the prodigal, someday return home. We generally follow the model given to us by St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in the booklet *Holy Hour of Reparation* published by CMJ Marian Publishers. If you would like a copy of the booklet, we have a small supply in our office or you can order one by calling the publisher at 1-888-636-6799. Another beautiful prayer is the *Chaplet of the Precious Blood* that was enclosed in a previous letter. We would be happy to provide you with a copy. "That the necessity of reparation is especially urgent today must be evident to everyone who considers the present plight of the world, 'seated in wickedness'. The Sacred Heart of Jesus promised to St. Margaret Mary that He would reward abundantly with His graces all those who should render this honor to His Heart." (Pope Pius XI Encyclical *Miserentissimus*)

Please note if you cannot attend the August 19th meeting, our next regular meeting is September 16th.

For more information regarding our meetings, or to talk about the issue of same-sex attraction in your lives, call our Diocesan office at 517-342-2596 or email us at caverart@comcast.net Your donation to help defray the cost of sending this letter and enclosure is always welcome and can be sent to the Diocese of Lansing.

We look forward to meeting with you. Let us remember, however, to always respect the right of each to complete confidentiality.

Trusting in Jesus,



Bob and Susan Cavera

"We are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves, and we are not at peace with ourselves, because we are not at peace with God".

Thomas Merton

DAILY NEWS

Does the Church Hate Persons With Same-Sex Attraction?

Father Paul Check of Courage International puts the question of homosexuality in its proper context.

BY SUE ELLEN BROWDER

| Posted 7/13/12 at 2:38 AM

As the California Proposition 8 marriage case wends its way toward the U.S. Supreme Court, the Church is subjected to increasingly hostile attacks. The NewCivilRightsMovement.com, which reports on same-sex "marriage" issues, tells its readers, "The Catholic Church is the world's single largest anti-gay hate group" and that Pope Benedict's defense of the traditional family in January was "preposterous anti-gay hate speech."

In such a verbally violent climate, how can Catholics explain the Church's teachings of love, marriage and life? In search of answers, we recently spoke with Father Paul Check, executive director of Courage International, a 30-year-old Church apostolate ministering to people with same-sex attraction.



As an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps for nine years before entering the seminary, Father Check feels "very happy" to be doing this work and says it brings him "great peace." Just as he saw his Marines as his sons, so he sees himself as a spiritual father to those struggling with same-sex attractions.

"I think Our Lord has a special heart for those who feel like lost sheep or estranged, as if the Church as an institution does not understand their struggle," Father Check said. He said the Courage ministry has made him very aware of the many ways messages can become painfully garbled or mistranslated and of the urgency for the Church to communicate Christ's pastoral charity for all people, whatever their difficulties.

Father Check, a priest of the Diocese of Bridgeport, Conn., became director of Courage in 2008, succeeding the late Father John Harvey, who directed the ministry since its founding.

You said in a talk posted on your Courage [website](#) that to explain Catholic teachings on homosexuality we need to start with the Trinity.

Yes. The Church says that Christ has shown us the way to be fully human. Who are we? What does it mean to act in a way consistent with our human nature? A very basic and universal question is: What is the right thing to do? To arrive at the right answer, we need to begin with the Church's anthropological understanding of who man is in Christ. And so to the point about the Trinity: God is first One, but he is three-in-one.

When we say man is made "in the image and likeness of God," what do we mean?

We mean we are created in the image of a communion of love and truth. Our true fulfillment, our true joy comes by entering into God's life and living the joy of the Trinity's self-giving, self-forgetful love, which has been made possible by the Incarnation.

We have immediate needs for food, shelter and medical attention for serious illness. But our most fundamental, basic human desire is to love and be loved, to know and be known.

We are made “blessedly incomplete,” in the words of University of Texas moral philosopher J. Budziszewski. This means we have to go out of ourselves to find that unity and joy that comes from uniting the heart not just to something else, but to someone else.

What happens when I refuse to open up to the joy of self-giving love, when I want to forget about God and have everything my own way?

Then you are going to be at cross-purposes with yourself, engaged in a self-defeating search for happiness. By that I mean you will be acting in a self-centered way directly contrary to the way you were made. In John 15, Our Lord gives us a wonderful phrase that might explain the purpose of the Incarnation, which is the restoration of lost joy. Referring to the commandments, Christ says, “I have told you these things that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” The commandments express our human nature — that is to say, how to act in a way that is authentically human. To be faithful to the design of humanity is to preserve joy.

Fascinating. Before we talk more directly about homosexuality, can you give us a non-sexual example of an individual being at cross-purposes with himself?

Take the appetite for food, for instance. I greatly enjoy chocolate cake and red wine. But if I eat half a cake and drink half a bottle of wine, I’ll spoil my enjoyment.

By failing to observe the proper order or limits on my appetite, I will be at cross-purposes with myself, and the very thing I desired — the enjoyment of that cake and wine — will slip away. Why? Because by acting outside the design — or limits — of my nature, I am engaged in self-harm. On the other hand, when we act in a way consistent with our human nature, then we’re on the path to the joy beyond joy, that supernatural joy received only through grace.

What happens if I try to fill my “blessed incompleteness” in an unchaste way?

If you don’t follow the pattern of self-giving love for which you were made — if you act unchastely in any way — then you’ll be acting selfishly. Selfishness — sin — is the opposite of joy. Masturbation, pornography, prostitution, fornication, contraception, adultery and homosexual behavior are all, in one way or another, a desire for sexual fulfillment outside nature and God’s design for love and life.

In these ways, an individual attempts to fill the naturally human desire for intimacy and love with a counterfeit deception that may be intensely exciting for the moment but will bring neither lasting peace nor true joy.

How is contraception related to homosexual activity?

The fundamental problem with contraception is that it is not natural to characterize something good (life) as an evil against which we must defend ourselves by deliberately trying to change the structure of human intimacy. That is why, as Blessed Pope John Paul II points out in *Evangelium Vitae* 13, it is a short step from contraception to abortion. Once we separate procreation from marriage by deliberately choosing sterile sex, then it is a short step to separating sex from marriage, and then separating sex from any recognizable design.

What makes homosexual behavior different from other forms of sexual activity?

The erotic desire for a member of the same sex can never be fulfilled in a way consistent with nature’s design for human intimacy. The individual engaging in homosexual behavior will always be engaged in a self-defeating search for joy. But we must note that any use of the sexual faculty outside nature’s design will lead to the same result.

You said Courage never uses the word homosexual as a noun, as in “I am a homosexual.” Why not?

Because no one should be defined exclusively or even predominantly by their sexual faculty. The same-sex-attracted person's identity is far richer than that, and the use of words like "gay" and "homosexual" and "lesbian" are at best confusing or ambiguous.

In general, there is too much self-identification in the culture today with sexual activity. Promiscuity has not made people happier. We are sexual beings, but to understand that properly, we must return to the question of "What is man?"

In the heart and mind of the Church, what is the same-sex-attracted person's identity?

A son or daughter of God, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, the beneficiary of grace in this life, and invited to glory in the life to come. That's what essentially describes the human person, and it is the most important thing that can be said about us. The Church also tells us that our sexual identity is primarily defined as "man" or "woman," as he created us, not by our sexual attractions or subjective sense of ourselves.

Why are same-sex couples living together denied holy Communion when cohabiting opposite-sex couples can receive the Eucharist?

Sexual sins of any kind are considered by the Church to be a grave matter, and the person who knowingly or willingly commits them has placed himself or herself outside of communion; until the person repents and receives absolution, he or she would not be free to approach the altar for Communion.

But the question is this: Do we really consider chastity to be part of the "Good News"? If so, there will not be any inconsistency in our pastoral practice, which may be what some same-sex-attracted persons perceive ... and they may be right.

That's where the difficulty lies. A same-sex couple looks out among the people in the parish and says, "Well, here are two people who are cohabiting. Here are married people using contraception. Some of them are lectors or extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. They all seem to be free to come up and receive holy Communion. Why are you singling us out?" And, in a sense, it's a fair question.

What's the answer?

The answer is that even though we have a magisterial teaching that everyone knows, institutionally we have not done a good job of helping people understand why contraception puts them at cross-purposes with their own desire to love and be loved. Look at any Pew Forum poll, and it will indicate that Catholics in regard to sexual morality are little different from others in our culture.

We have to go back and recover the ground we've lost in order for the question of homosexuality to be situated in the proper context.

We need to teach Humanae Vitae with renewed fervor.

Yes ... to foster generosity, self-giving and joy.

Easier said than done. Many Catholics find the Church's teaching on contraception very hard to explain.

It's actually not hard at all. It's very simple. The philosophical or anthropological problem with contraception is this: It calls a good evil. It says the procreative power is something to be defended against.

Look at all the fields of medicine — neurology, pulmonology, cardiology. Which field is actively working to suppress the natural functioning of the body? None of them. Heart doctors aren't trying to stop the heart. Lung doctors are not trying to stop the lungs from working. Optometrists don't try to keep people in the dark. It's only in that particular field of medicine which concerns itself with reproductive systems that some are actively engaged in deliberately trying to thwart the process of nature.

Medicine is supposed to be at the service of the body. Why would there be so-called "medicine" that's trying to stop the natural functioning and fulfillment of the organs? And why do women bear the largest brunt of these medical assaults? Those are questions we all need to ask.

The Church has been accused of waging a "war on women" by opposing contraception. How does contraception interfere with a woman's search for true love?

Everyone wants to be desired, first and foremost, for who and what they are, not for what they can do. It seems, to me, any woman who is using contraception can never be certain whether she is desired first for who she is and not just for what she can do. It's an open question, because contraception makes her radically available in a way that it's very easy for the man to set aside any concerns about the consequences for her, including pregnancy. The more unruly and immoderate the sexual appetite becomes, the more men and women may see each other as mere instruments for the sexual satisfaction they're seeking.

Interesting. Returning to the many sexual questions of our age — from pornography to homosexuality — you suggested the Church already has an answer. What is it?

We need to help people understand that chastity is part of the Good News. It's that simple. Chastity is the virtue that liberates man from selfishness, so he can fulfill his natural desires for human intimacy and love in a way consistent with the way he was made.

Register correspondent Sue Ellen Browder writes from Ukiah, California.

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FIRST THINGS

Why I Don't Call Myself a Gay Christian

*Daniel Mattson
July 27, 2012*

Joshua Gonnerman recently wrote a provocative piece for this column, "Dan Savage Was Right." What began as an advocacy for the Church to become family for the homosexual community soon became a discussion of the validity of Gonnerman's matter of fact description of himself as "a Christian who is committed to chastity and who is also gay." His piece went viral within the Christian blogosphere, and as a result, Gonnerman wrote a follow-up piece, "Why I Call Myself a Gay Christian."

As all Catholics in English speaking nations have learned since Advent of this liturgical year, words matter, for they convey reality in matters of revelation and reason. By adopting "consubstantial" in the Creed—admittedly an awkward term and one quite absent from common usage—the Church conveys a fundamental truth about Jesus's identity in the Holy Trinity in theologically precise ways.

I too am a Roman Catholic, living with a homosexual inclination and committed to chastity. But I do not identify as "gay." Rather, I say that "I live with same-sex attraction." Like "consubstantial," it is an awkward phrase, nearly absent from common usage. I refuse to identify myself as gay because the label "gay" does not accurately describe who (or what) I am. More fundamentally, I refuse to use that label because I desire to be faithful to the theological anthropology of the Church.

In 1986, as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger wrote the "Pastoral Letter on the Care of the Homosexual Person." In it, we read:

The human person, made in the image and likeness of God, can hardly be adequately described by a reductionist reference to his or her sexual orientation. Every one living on the face of the earth has personal problems and difficulties, but challenges to growth, strengths, talents and gifts as well. Today, the Church provides a badly needed context for the care of the human person when she refuses to consider the person as a "heterosexual" or a "homosexual" and insists that every person has a fundamental Identity: the creature of God, and by grace, his child and heir to eternal life.

With confidence in the Church, I embrace this teaching about my identity in the same way that I have accepted the word "consubstantial" in the Creed. I accept all of the words of the Catechism concerning who I am in nature and in grace. I take no umbrage at the phrase

“objectively disordered” and feel no shame that it truthfully describes my sexual desires. I view my same-sex attraction as a disability, in some ways similar to blindness, or deafness, and I view it with the same hope communicated by Jesus about the man born blind: It has been allowed in my life, so that God’s work would be made manifest in me (cf. John 9:3). In the words of Tolkien, I view it as my personal “Eucatastrophe.”

I think it is a mistake to view homosexuality as a gift, in and of itself. Those who identify as gay speak of the great gifts that supposedly flow from their homosexuality. But of course, any goods that are supposedly unique to homosexuality are common to man, and all that is good in man is the result of being made in the image and likeness of God. My career in the performing arts is not even indirectly caused by my same-sex attraction, but instead because God is the creator of music and beauty. I believe that great good can come as a result of living with this disordered inclination, but it only comes when I acknowledge it as a weakness, and in response, fall to my knees before the good God who looks upon me daily with “a serene and kindly countenance,” and comforts me with the words “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”

The good that flows from the homosexual inclination is not an exceptional “otherness,” as Elizabeth Scalia seems to suggest. No, the good is the redemptive healing work of God that begins when we honestly acknowledge that homosexuality is a wound. If we do so, we can become “Wounded Healers,” in the way that Henri Nouwen viewed his own wounds, which we now know included same-sex attraction. Nouwen should be our model: humbly accepting the Church’s teachings, in *all* things, and abandoning the rest to Divine Providence. If we desire to bring the gay community into the family of God, it will not be through a celebration of homosexuality, or by changing the language of the Church in order to make it feel more welcoming to them. The path of evangelization is the cross. In recalling St. Paul’s success at evangelization, Ratzinger reminds us that “The success of his mission was not the fruit of great rhetorical art or pastoral prudence; the fruitfulness was tied to the suffering, to the communion in the passion with Christ.”

The gay community will become family when those of us in the Church who live with the inclination accept it for what it truly is: a deep wound within our persons which we joyfully choose to unite with the Suffering Christ, on behalf of those we love so dearly in the gay community. By his wounds we are healed, and by the acceptance and transformation of our wounds, through the love of Christ, the Holy Spirit will draw them home to their Heavenly Father.

Daniel Mattson lives in the midwest, where he has a career in the arts. He takes great interest in the Church’s teaching on homosexuality and from time to time, he is invited to give his personal testimony to groups around the country.