



Courage & EnCourage
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ENCOURAGE SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Roman Catholic Diocese of Lansing Chapter

When: Sunday September 16, 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.

We look forward to seeing you at this month's meeting. Susan and I took personal time last month to celebrate a family event in Northern Wisconsin. We are ever grateful to Don who agreed to step in for us and moderate the meeting.

We have enclosed with this letter two testimonies from Courage members who share their personal struggles with same-sex attraction. It serves to give us hope for our own loved ones, and inspire us to deepen our prayers for them. We know that God is hearing us and that he has a plan for our loved ones. We must wait in patient hope. Personal stories of triumph are always uplifting and edifying. One of the joys resulting from attendance at a Courage Conference is the opportunity to hear the stories of those who have embraced the teachings of the church and have returned to the sacraments. We know as parents that we cannot change, restore, "fix" our son. We must love him as God loves us, unconditionally, and we must share the truth with him. God, in his time, will do his work.

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

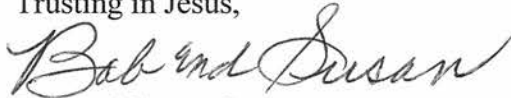
model given to us by St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in the booklet *Holy Hour of Reparation* published by CMJ Marian Publishers. If you would like a copy of the booklet, we have a small supply in our office or you can order one by calling the publisher at 1-888-636-6799. Another beautiful prayer is the *Chaplet 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 September 16th meeting, our next regular meeting is October 21st.

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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bob and Susan".

Bob and Susan Cavera

"Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God."

2 Cor 7:1

THE TESTIMONY OF A DIOCESAN COURAGE MEMBER:

“So faith, hope, love remain, these three: but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13).

I’m honored to have this opportunity to share my story with you—one filled with strife, yes, but one that is also filled with faith, hope and love that can only come through the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

I grew up in what today would be considered a large Catholic family. To the outside observer, our family might have been thought of as ideal. We attended Holy Mass every weekend and holy day of obligation and were active within our home parish, partaking in all of the fundraisers and festivals. Looks can be deceiving, though.

Simply put, my father was what the Irish call a “street angel and home devil.” My siblings and I were subject to repeated acts of physical and verbal abuse. I was pummeled from pillar to post throughout my childhood, adolescence and teen years. Although the bruises that accompanied the physical abuse would heal in short fashion, the verbal assaults and their affects would fester, ultimately changing my worldview, leaving gaping wounds and scars that have yet to fully heal.

The only way that I could make sense of my father’s behavior as a child was to believe that I must have been inherently bad. “I must be worthless because he told me so”, I thought. And thus, the seeds of destruction that thrive in the absence of true love—specifically the seeds of fear and hate--were planted.

I first noticed an attraction to members of the same sex in late adolescence. To say that my life was a living hell would be an understatement. Full of shame—my dignity as a child of God having been stripped through years of trauma-- and feeling abandoned by God Who was reflected in my father, I turned to a life of moral depravity.

In his Encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI wrote: “We can try to limit suffering, to fight against it, but we cannot eliminate it. It is when we attempt to avoid suffering...that we drift into a life of emptiness”. Like the Prodigal Son I wandered into what is translated in the original Greek as “the big empty space” and remained for several years. I learned the hard way that living in squalor, giving-in to every whim and desire, leads not to happiness and freedom but rather slavery and spiritual death. Through a confluence of events that I can only attribute to the grace of God, I came back to my senses, and like the Prodigal Son I returned, only to realize that God had been waiting patiently the entire time.

Since then, my journey has been long and arduous, replete with hardship and struggle. Although I’m not where I’d like to be, I’m not where I used to be, either. Through the tireless efforts of a dedicated brother in Christ, I’ve learned to ask “what” instead of “why”. What is going on at a deeper level? Ultimately, deep down is a little boy, who after all these years, still longs for the love and acceptance of his father. I’ve also learned that I am not self-sufficient. Although God doesn’t need me, I need Him. St. Augustine said that there are two loves in life: the love of self to the point of forgetfulness of God or the love of God to the point of self-forgetfulness. So, Like Bartimaeus, I’ve learned to beg—to beg for mercy but also the grace needed to forget myself, take up my cross and follow faithfully after Jesus Christ in the ways of love, for in the final analysis, love is all that matters. Although this task is difficult, I’ve found much comfort, solace and strength through my association with the local Courage chapter.

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20).

In the fall of 2009, I attended my first Courage meeting. I have been a regular attendee since and am grateful for many reasons.

First and foremost, when suffering is particularly acute it is easy for one to think that he suffers alone. Meeting regularly dispels that notion and at the same time allows me to move outside of myself by realizing that suffering is part of the human condition and is shared by all. Secondly, it isn't easy in this day and age to live a chaste life, which is one of the goals of Courage, and so the axiom “strength in numbers” takes on new and significant meaning. Thirdly, we are encouraged to stay close to the Holy Sacraments of the Church, especially the Sacrament of Confession and Holy Mass, as well as daily prayer in an effort to lead lives that are truly pleasing to God. Last but certainly not least I would like to share one final reason. Please allow me to pull a quote from a book entitled, *The Way of the Disciple*. The author, Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, gives a profound commentary regarding the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman from St. John's Gospel that I find very apropos to Courage in general. Merikakis writes:

...They are nevertheless two pariahs meeting in the solitude of rejection. Shared rejection frees them to be themselves with one another beyond all social conventions. ‘Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose’, bellowed the tragic rock star Janice Joplin. Solitude, rejection and exhaustion: Jesus and the woman share the same yoke.

We—you and I—are the Samaritan woman and therefore share the same yoke as the Son of God who is present “whenever two or three are gathered in His name”. And so, we gather...with shared goals as men and women who are determined to live our lives with dignity as intended by God, realizing after much pain and heartache that we need to surrender daily to His Will. We gather in an effort to live not as the world tells us but rather by the time-tested truths that Holy Mother Church in Her wisdom extols with the aid of grace freely given through the Holy Sacraments. Are we saints? Certainly not. Are we striving for ever increasing sanctity and freedom in Christ? Yes. It isn't easy, but the same exhortation given to St. Paul over two thousand years ago is given ever anew today: “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor. 12:9).

My parting words are simply this: know for certain that there are people who sit in the pews of your churches every Sunday that struggle with same sex attraction. Know also that they feel a tremendous amount of shame and embarrassment as a result of a condition that quite frankly is beyond their control. Many in an attempt to escape have succumbed to vice or addiction. Many only know rejection and hate and are told by the world to lead lives that will only exacerbate their problems. So, I implore you to be merciful and compassionate but I also encourage you to challenge them to lead the lives God intended given their state in life. It is my earnest and sincere prayer that Courage be given a greater voice in our diocese for the good of the souls who suffer in this regard. May God continue to bless you and please be assured of my continued prayers for you and all the Church.

04-06-2012

BREAKING FREE FROM HOMOSEXUALITY

One Man's Journey to Life in Christ

by David Prosen

My family consisted of my father, mother, and my younger sister, Darlene. My mother and I always had a good relationship, but my father and I did not. He was an alcoholic and often physically abused me.

While growing up, my Dad tried to teach me the things in life that he enjoyed, such as carpentry and landscaping. However, it would always end with him losing his patience, screaming obscenities, and calling me names. My dad never taught me sports such as baseball or football. At school, when it was time to divide in teams, I was one of the last picked. The team that ended up having me loudly complained and made it clear that I was not like them.

Everything associated with masculinity brought me much panic. As a child, I didn't enjoy playing with cars and toy guns. Instead, I enjoyed role-playing games such as house and, yes, even dolls. For as long as I can remember, I had an attraction to the same gender. When I reached puberty this attraction intensified and brought me much turmoil. This confirmed to me that my male peers were right; I was different.

At about age 15, an older male befriended me. I began to look up to him as an older brother. One night, this friendship was betrayed when he took advantage of me sexually. He played many mind games and emotionally abused me. I sank into a deep



despair as this sinful behavior continued for three months. I then decided to give Jesus a chance. At first, I was on an emotional high, but despite my years of catechism classes, I didn't understand my faith or the sacraments. For example, I didn't recognize the sustaining power of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. When the emotional high left, I became very lonely and felt once again that I didn't fit in.

Numbing the Pain

I began using marijuana and alcohol to help numb the pain. Once I turned 18, I went to my first gay bar. At first it was exhilarating. I felt like I finally could be myself, but the emptiness only worsened and I relied even more heavily

on substances to help deal with the pain. I had lived an active "gay" life for two years, but was given a special grace and realized how sinful I had been. From this point on I turned my life over to Christ several times, but again, still not understanding that conversion is an ongoing, daily process by which God's grace transforms us. I would always end up falling back into the bondage of sin and heading deeper into darkness. After one of these falls, I learned of places where one could go to have promiscuous sex. I so desperately wanted to be held and loved that I fell into a horrendous cycle of addiction. I would want to be held, fall into sin, feel worse, do it again to feel better, feel even worse, and on and on and on.

www.designpics.com

In the midst of all this pain, the worst was about to happen. My sister, whom I had become very close to, suddenly collapsed with a heart attack and died instantly at the age of 21. After working through some of the grief, her death forced me to face my own mortality. I needed to seriously work at building a strong foundation on Christ, instead of looking for the emotional highs that I had depended on in the past.

Light in the Darkness

I was chaste for five and half years by His grace and some awesome things started happening. I quit alcohol and drugs and completely dropped out of the "gay" scene. Also, God helped me forgive my dad and the relationship between us improved.

But I wasn't able to see these amazing things God was doing because every day was a living hell for me filled with shame. I begged God many times every day for a cure, but the attraction never went away. Some people said, "You don't have enough faith." Others said, "You must be sinning in some other area of your life." These statements only added to my shame. One day, a friend of mine said, "David, maybe God isn't curing you because maybe there isn't anything wrong with being homosexual." After much thought, I decided she might be right.

Although I went back into living a life of sin, I believe God used this imperfect situation to teach me some truths about what love really is. He never let go of me, even when I let go of Him. One day, I felt God say to my heart, "Yes, you never chose this attraction, but you *can* choose whether or not you will act on it." I picked up the Catechism and learned that this was a cross, and that we all have our crosses to carry. "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' (Mt. 16:24). He gives us the graces to carry our crosses; all we have to do is ask Him and be open to these graces. If it weren't for crosses such as Darlene's death, I am sure that I would be spiritually and physically dead.

Ongoing Healing

By God's grace I have been chaste for 10 years and this time there is no shame . . . praise God! I enrolled at Franciscan University of Steubenville last year and, since then, the Lord has been leading me on a journey of healing. The Lord had shown me that I was harboring anger toward my childhood male peers who mocked me and teased me. I learned that I transferred this anger toward any male that was perceived by me as extremely macho. By God's grace, I have let go of this anger and so many tremendous things have been happening.

For a paper in my Christian Moral Principles class, I read Dr. Gerard J.M. Van Den Aardweg's book, *The Battle for Normality: A Guide for (Self) Therapy for Homosexuality*. The Lord used this to bring about much more healing. I learned that the attraction I had toward males was actually an admiration of those who had masculine or physical traits that I felt I lacked as a child. In puberty, this admiration became sexualized. In addition, I learned that when I was living the homosexual lifestyle, I was coveting what other men possessed. I was affirmed when men who were more masculine or attractive than me showed and interest in me.

God has shown me that true love is not primarily about seeking affirmation, or attempting to have our physical and spiritual needs met. As Pope John Paul II says in *Theology of the Body*, love is a sincere gift of self, and our various needs will be met by God and others when we express love in this authentic manner.

God has brought into my life Catholic male friends who have spent time with me this past summer showing me how to throw a ball, catch, and hit. That child inside of me has been getting the affirmation he had so desperately sought. And as a result of these healings, I am feeling things toward the opposite sex that I haven't felt before. Do I still struggle with same-sex attraction? Yes, but the attractions are less intense. I don't know what God's will is for me, but I want to remain open to it whether it is the chaste single life or even marriage.

Courage

One thing I found very helpful in my journey is my involvement with Courage. Courage is the only Catholic support group for those with same-sex attractions that is approved by the Catholic Church. Members in Courage strive to live chaste lives in accordance with the Church's teachings on homosexuality. During these past 10 years, I desperately sought support from other Catholics who were going through the same struggles but who wanted to live chaste lives. In my former diocese, I found little or no support, and often what support I was given condoned the sin. This has helped me realize how important it is that we promote and support Courage.

I was blessed to be able to go to the National Courage Conference this past summer and was so impressed. Our Holy Father calls Courage "the work of God." I couldn't help but meditate on those words as I experienced God's love, power, and healing as attendees shared their stories with others who are on the same journey.

If a person is struggling with same-sex attraction, they are not alone, nor do they have to be alone in their journey. I encourage them to go to the Courage website, www.couragerc.net, and see if there is a meeting being held in their area. If not, a person can register on their website and communicate with other Courage members from around the world. The Courage website also has a recommended reading list covering many aspects of same-sex attraction, including what we know about the causes.

Some people told me that I had to be true to myself and accept my homosexuality in order to be happy. God has shown me that I am being true to myself by living in accordance with His Word. I am much happier now than I have ever been before. I no longer escape pain but, instead, I try to work through it. And each time comes growth. And with each growth comes a profound joy and peace in Jesus Christ.

David Prosen writes from Steubenville, OH. For more information on Courage, see p. 19 of this issue.