



Courage & EnCourage
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ENCOURAGE SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Roman Catholic Diocese of Lansing Chapter

When: Sunday March 16, 2014 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.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent and the blessed opportunity for prayer and fasting. While we don't often consider fasting as a blessing, at least I don't, it really is a gift intended for us to deepen our relationship with God. It is a means to access the blessings God has for us; a way for us to understand His will for us and for our loved ones. Don't waste your Lent; pray together and pray often, and in addition to your loved ones, pray for the ministry and leadership of Courage and EnCourage.

We have enclosed two autobiographies of Courage members that we hope you will find inspirational. The stories of Courage members are, indeed, just that, 'courageous' stories. The strength to move from regarding yourself as 'homosexual' 'gay' 'lesbian' to regarding your self as a 'son of God' or 'a daughter of God' is most admirable and inspirational. We pray for the day when our loved one will come to this blessed identity.

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

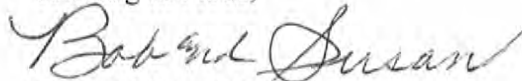
through our sinful condition. Additionally, we pray as intercessors for all our loved ones who will, like the prodigal, someday return home. We generally follow the model given to us by St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in the booklet ***Holy Hour of Reparation*** published by CMJ Marian Publishers. If you 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 is available upon request. "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 March 16th meeting, our next regular meeting is April 13th. You should also note that this is the second Sunday of the month. **This year Easter falls on the third Sunday so we moved the meeting day to the 13th of April which is the second Sunday.**

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 courage@dioceseoflansing.org

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

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for woe! Plans to give you a future full of hope."

Jeremiah 29:11



I grew up in the 1960s and '70s and I was a product of the times: whatever feels good, do it. It was the beginning of the sexual revolution, and I really did believe that "sex is the integrating force in life."

When I was told that the Church was teaching chastity, it came as a bit of a shock: There I was, full of passion and wanting so much to be involved in a relationship. I was thinking, "I need to be in a relationship or else I can't breathe. Is there life

without this kind of relationship?" I really didn't know how to handle it. I went through a lot of stages with it.

Early in my conversion experience I was introduced to the spirituality of St. Peter Julian Eymard and the person of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. It was like the Lord was saying, "You do need a person; you need me. And I am here." This was all new to me – really experiencing and being told that I needed to come before the Tabernacle every single day to work on a relationship with Him. I started to sense that our Lord was very real and that He was taking care of me.

Gradually, a certain level of trust started to form as I was being led spiritually and taught what chastity was all about. Over the years, I've come to my own definition of chastity. I see it as getting sober; separating myself from certain persons, places and things so that I can get in touch with a deeper sense of who I am in my deepest identity. Chastity is getting sober for the integration of ourselves.

I think that's a positive way of looking at it. There are too many negative connotations to the word chastity. You tell someone that they have to lead a chaste life and they're like, "OOOOHHHH!!!" And I had that same feeling. "This is going to be like a punishment. Why do I have to live chastely?" But in the seventeen years now that I've attempted to live this way, chastity has really been a positive experience for the integration of myself. There's an empty space within all of us that's reserved for God and for the deeper spiritual things. And there is a whole aspect of spiritual healing in becoming chaste.

I proceeded with my own healing with an openness toward becoming heterosexual [in my orientation]. I really had the best spiritual directors and the best psychotherapists. But I found that I always returned to a sense of woundedness in myself. Now I realize that in my past I was victimized emotionally and physically. These experiences caused wounds. I have tried to work them out and I am still working on them in therapy. But I have found that it is in my falls and in the times when I felt my weakest that I have sensed the Lord's presence most strongly. I have sensed myself going deeper into the Lord, into union with Him. I call this the "theology of weakness".

A lot of us were raised in dysfunctional family systems where we grew up with the need to be perfect. It is really the idea of codependency, meaning that we try to validate ourselves and obtain a sense of self-worth by attaching ourselves to another person – either through fixing, rescuing or controlling. We were taught to relate to other people in a certain way. We were taught not to look at our weaknesses, and we got frightened by it. We have to run away from it. But for me there has always been a real lesson, a real theology, in weakness. St. Paul uses the idea often in his writings. He was three times fallen and couldn't get past something – whatever that was for him – emotionally or physically. The Lord allowed something to remain in him that was a real weakness. In a sense, I see our walk [toward chastity] in the same way.

We don't fall in the corner and say, "God is going to judge us by our orientation." He's going to judge us by our behavior and our attitudes. God works with our raw material, and He's not scandalized by it. He knows what preceded me. He knows the third and fourth generation of my family and the weakness that's been there for who knows how long. And He knows how I grew up in it. There is nothing that God doesn't understand about my weakness. But God is constantly working through the weaknesses in our lives. I see that as part of the way in which our Father in heaven has proposed to save us. What I'm going to say right now is very Catholic: [Our struggle for chastity] is a sharing in the passion of Jesus. I've been led constantly to the passion of Jesus . . . to put my wounds into His wounds.

I've titled this talk "The Kingdom of God is Within You" because it is within ourselves that we have to find the Kingdom. We have to accept our insides. We can't run away from who we are. And our weakness is part of us. The kingdom doesn't lie in any outside solution or in running away from ourselves and trying to be somebody else. It's not in our fantasies, it's not found in a relationship, it's not in drugs, alcohol, sex, . . . it lies right within us, in the very depths of who we are. And this includes our weakness.

St. Therese the Little Flower (*Complete Spiritual Doctrine of St Theresa of Lisieux*. Rev. Francois Jamait, OCT Alba House). had come up with her own theology when she was at her death. She said: "We will only grow interiorly when we can accept our poverty and our littleness and in our powerlessness depend on God. We must learn to tolerate or own deficiencies and not deny them." St. Therese made this her little way. She knew her poverty, her limitations, her inadequacies. She learned through her experience of weakness that she could have tremendous confidence in God her Father. She came to accept her nothingness, her powerlessness, and to believe in God's power. She said, "We must love our littleness and our weakness and have complete confidence in God. Unfortunately, most souls impede the operation of God's merciful love for transforming us because they refuse to accept their poverty and weakness. But more especially because they do not even realize how poor and weak they are."

Most gay activists get greatly offended when [the homosexual orientation] is referred to as a disorder. I wonder what they would say about St. Therese's remarks. They probably would want to string her up somewhere. . . . But heterosexual or homosexual, we are all disordered or flawed to some extent. St. Therese goes on to say, "The greatest awareness we can have is to accept the truth about ourselves. It is the key to the spiritual life and to a wonderful relationship with God. It gives us deep peace and takes the pressure off of us. god cannot resist us when we abandon ourselves to Him in all honesty and sincerity and say that we cannot do this or that. I am completely powerless over this emotion of anger, lust, jealousy, etc. So Lord, I give it to you."

It seemed to me, at first, that this meant having to become powerless and vulnerable again. I felt that I was returning to a state that I didn't trust, because someone had hurt me when I was there before. But I have to let the Lord love this fear off of me. The more I can feel His love, the more it will burn away my fear. I have to kind of shift gears and it's painful. But through that pain I have a stronger sense of who I am. I am totally integrated in that painful spot.

We in the Courage movement are being called to witness the power of living in the passion of Jesus, and in the power of His resurrection running through us. Philippians 3 is the closest thing to what I would say is my experience: "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the sharing of His sufferings by becoming like Him in His death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead." That thought is a very life-giving reality, that I can unite something of me into Jesus and become more like Him. It's not easy. It's a decision and a choice I make every day.

Don't Call Me "Gay!"

I am a man who suffers from unwanted same-sex attraction but who does not consider himself "gay." As I understand it, the word "gay" is a socio-political and reductionist term used by those who advance the homosexual life style. However, the word "gay" cannot define who a person is. This is a crucial point and one which the general public may not fully understand.

When someone in the "gay community" uses the word "gay," he or she means anyone who embraces or freely acts upon homoerotic thoughts or behaviors. It is a term that specifically denotes the belief (with political consequences) that a person who has same-sex attractions would be *fulfilled* by expressing them. It is intended to be a word of liberation in the sense that the term implies a "coming out" from a kind of societally imposed bondage. Once a person has been "liberated" from this supposed suppression, he or she is ready to begin the adventure toward the "sexual fulfillment" of their desires. A person "comes out" as "gay."

This is not the position of those who see themselves first and foremost as children of God—as men and women in Christ who believe that God created human sexuality for the fulfillment of His plan for human life. God's plan is realized either in individual chastity (in which we might love Him more singularly) or in chastity within a marriage between a man and a woman (in which physical attraction, rightly used, leads to the fulfillment of *His plan*, rather than our plan, for human sexuality and the openness to new life). This rightly ordered and healthy manifestation of sexuality is part of the Natural Law, a way of being that we recognize in our hearts as the Truth, one that brings us to know God's Love more fully. A theoretical win-win situation for us all.

In my life, God's plan was distorted when I turned from God's Revealed understanding of human sexuality and from His sovereignty in my life. This turning away was manifest in choices that led to bad habits and eventually to alienation from God, from myself and from others. This process began in childhood, prior to the age of reason, when I was overwhelmed by developmental distortions that interfered with my ability to identify with the masculine—partly due to my inherent characteristics and partly due to environmental factors (social, psychological and familial) that led me, eventually, to embrace the worldview of the gay community, a community which seemed to fulfill my need to be accepted and affirmed. This combination of inherent and environmental factors prevented me from fully identifying with masculinity, especially with the physical male-gendered body into which I was born.

I craved the attention and affection of other boys and men, those who I nevertheless felt inadequate to please, even with my best efforts. This perception was reinforced by many experiences in my childhood. During pubescence (after I was molested by an older boy), I sexualized this strong need for connection with the masculine, an identity I longed for but did not feel. This initiated my entrance into homoerotic / homosexual experimentation and fantasy. I began to believe that I *could* connect with other males—but because I could connect only in a sexual manner, I could not, even with my best efforts, experience the connection I really desired: that of being one with the others and of clearly belonging in the world of men. Instead, I could only achieve this connection through an active fantasy life and later by trying to possess sexually what I could not access from my own weakly identified masculinity.

The consequences of pursuing same-sex attraction for me was the development of a painful moral incongruity with my values as a practicing Christian, one whose strong primary identity was as a child of God. The awareness of being a child of God inclined me to want to do His will, to live a chaste life in order to be happy and to fulfill my baptismal promises. But my experience of unwanted same-sex attraction interfered with my ability to respond as a man in Christ, as a child of God. My psychological distress seemed to represent an

apparent irresolvable conflict—**unwanted** same-sex attraction, a sexual inclination that was not in conformity with what I knew to be the Church's teaching and not in conformity with my inherent human desire for sexual fulfillment.

I came to experience complete alienation from my true identity as a child of God when I began acting out homosexually in the "gay community," a lifestyle in which sex seemed to be an action not tied to any values other than sexual "fulfillment." I also saw how my longings for connection with my own sexual identity, which had developed so poorly, was leading me to use other men simply to fulfill my desire for that masculinity which seemed to be lacking in myself; by possessing them, I longed to possess what would make *me* feel like a man. The failure to achieve this led to intensified cravings.

The incredible difficulty of regaining, repairing or achieving the development of a desired masculinity for a man who has same-sex attraction cannot be underestimated. For me, withdrawing from unwanted same-sex attraction and living in chastity has been like withdrawing from heroin. I have, for a long time, used this drug (lust) to keep me functioning in my life as well as to enable me to cope with the incredible alienation I still occasionally feel from other men (and from my own masculinity), especially when I cling to the thought that they would hate or avoid me if they knew the inclination with which I struggled. Thankfully, this alienation has lessened since I began the work of "reparative therapy." I now feel as if I have a truer self, yet I still struggle on occasion with lust even as I progress in my development—but, by God's grace, such struggles make me human, like every one else.

The distinction between the word "gay" and the expression "unwanted same-sex attraction" is essential to understand if you wish to engage accurately and with clarity in discourse regarding this area of human brokenness. To buy into the use of a term that does not truly or fully describe the experience of those persons with unwanted same-sex attraction is to fall prey to the "gay agenda," a movement which would like to silence anyone who does not give complete affirmation to same-sex sexual behavior. I hope my explanation will help others to better understand this important distinction.