



Courage & EnCourage
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ENCOURAGE SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Roman Catholic Diocese of Lansing Chapter

When: Sunday September 20, 2015 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 Musch Rd. Turn left or West on Musch Rd. to Holy Spirit Catholic Church. The Courage group meets in the new school that connects to the church in the Conference/Lending Library Room. The The EnCourage group meets in a school classroom. Look for Encourage and Courage Meeting Signs.

We are back after a month off in August. We had the pleasure of attending the annual Courage/EnCourage Conference in late July and early August. As always, the conference is a spiritual renewal and a holy blessing for the participants. As someone said, attending the conference is like a family reunion with a lot more prayer. If you have never attended one, make plans for 2016. There were many excellent speakers and copies of their presentations are available through the Courage office at www.couragerc.org

Also in August, we had the privilege of attending the *Welcoming and Accompanying Our Brothers and Sisters with Same-Sex Attraction Conference* in Plymouth, Michigan. This was a conference sponsored by the Archdiocese of Detroit and Courage International. It was a three day conference dedicated to developing and promoting ministry within the dioceses. The attendees included lay ministers, clergy, (priests and deacons), Bishops, Archbishops, and even a Cardinal. There were a number of excellent presentations that can be found in a book published by the conference that is offered for sale through Ignatius Press titled *Living the Truth in Love: Pastoral Approaches to Same-Sex Attraction*. Order a copy for yourselves and for your pastor or chaplain.

We have enclosed two articles that we think are relevant in today's cultural climate. The first is by Fr. Paul Check the Executive Director of Courage, on how to

respond to that difficult statement from our loved one when he or she proclaims, “I am Gay.” Father address not only a factual response but a response that hopefully will not terminate the relationship. The second article addresses the topic of transgenderism that in our current culture is now becoming a topic of public discussion. The author of this article has lived the experience and offers great insight.

Please also remember 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. This beautiful chaplet has been modified to address the specific concerns of Courage and EnCourage members. We have chosen to add this powerful prayer to our Holy Hour of Reparation. Please remember, “that the necessity of reparation is especially urgent today and 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 20th meeting, our next regular Diocesan EnCourage meeting is Sunday, October 18, 2015. If you would prefer to receive our letter and enclosures via email rather than regular mail please let us know, or if you no longer want to receive our letter please inform us.

For more information regarding our meetings, or to talk about the issue of same-sex attraction in your lives or the lives of loved ones, call our Diocesan office at 517-342-2596 or email us at courage@dioceseoflansing.org We might also mention that the Diocese of Lansing supports this ministry even though more than half of our letters go well beyond our borders. Any financial help you can give us is greatly appreciated.

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

“Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil.” (Eph. 6:11)

Daily News Realizing Our True Identity

COMMENTARY: The hardest thing for us to believe may be this: that God is good, even when things are not as they should be.

BY FATHER PAUL CHECK

| Posted 11/7/14 at 2:32 PM

Coming to his senses ... he got up and went back to his father (Luke 15:17, 20).

The Prodigal Son is the most beloved of all Jesus' parables, perhaps because it is the story, or at least the hoped-for story, of many human hearts. There is great drama in this story: a father's generosity, a son's willfulness, division within the family, a waste of gifts, self-inflicted suffering, humility, a moment of grace and truth, a change of heart, contrition, forgiveness and reconciliation. These themes suggest this parable, so central to the teaching of Christ, offers the spiritual foundation for questions regarding the pastoral care of families that the Church continues to consider.



A decisive moment in the parable comes when the son realizes his true identity: the child of a loving and generous father. "We know," St. Paul writes, "that all things work for good for those who love God" (Romans 8:28). "All things" ... for those who believe that they are children of a loving and generous Father.

The hardest thing for us to believe may be this: that God is good, even when things are not as they should be — for example, when someone we love is in difficulty, confused about the truth and perhaps acting on this confusion. But this parable reassures us that nothing falls outside of God's providence or the reach of his grace.

I am often asked a question I cannot answer easily: "Father, what do I say to my son, my daughter, my friend, etc., when he or she has told me, 'I am gay.'"

It is not an easy question to answer because much depends on the relationship the speaker has with the person, to what degree the person understands himself or herself in the light of his or her sexual attraction and other considerations.

Yet there are some things we can do as we prepare to respond to the self-revelation described above. The first might be to return to the Parable of the Prodigal Son and to the strength of the love and grace of Our Father in heaven. I am not saying that every person with same-sex attractions (SSA) is a prodigal, willful son or daughter. Not at all. The homosexual inclination itself is not sinful, the Church teaches; only the act is.

While I am certainly not proposing a strict analogy between the question of homosexuality and the Parable of the Prodigal Son, I do find aspects of the parable helpful in this context.

When the boy initially goes to his father, something has caused him to be confused about who he really is. In that moment, he is not thinking of himself first as a "beloved son." Another identity has superseded the truth. In time, the truth will return to him, but that clarity has come through suffering. Grace has been at work in "all things." The role of the priest in a time of trial is to steady hearts, to help deepen peace and to encourage people to believe that, during the trial, God is still good and that his grace is still at work. In these moments, the Paschal Mystery — the

salvific life, death and resurrection of Christ — becomes less notional, less of a theological principle and more of a lived reality of grace in the life of the soul. The Catechism has taken flesh.

This may seem a long preface in answer to the question a family member or friend poses about how to respond to someone who describes himself or herself as “gay.” In my experience of more than 10 years in the Courage apostolate, however, I believe it preserves the right order of things. Sound pastoral practice follows sound understanding of identity — or what is called “Christian anthropology”: knowing who we are, what we are and why we are. And those questions can only be fully answered by the Gospel and the Person of Jesus Christ.

“The Church’s teaching makes this hard, Father,” one parent said to me. I understood the point, but I gently suggested that it was not the Church’s teaching that made the situation difficult; it was, in part, his son’s confusion about himself that was causing the tension. Our Savior did not promise that the truth would be easy to accept or to live, but that it would bring us freedom and peace (John 8:32, 14:27).

In my opinion, homosexuality is not first a question of sex or of relationships. [It is first about identity](#) and, in particular, a misperception and confusion about who someone understands himself or herself to be.

What has brought that person to that understanding is, of course, important. The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of the “psychological genesis” of homosexuality (2357), which reminds us of what we know: that we live in a world of cause and effect. But at the moment of the self-revelation, the cause or causes are not the first concern, nor is an intervention intended to address or counteract them, well-intentioned though it may be.

First, we look to the Church, which is, in the words of Blessed Paul VI, “an expert in humanity.” Through sacred Scripture and her magisterial reflection on man’s identity in Christ, the Church assures us of something else we know: that the twofold expression of human nature is not heterosexual and homosexual, but male and female.

If man is made for woman, and woman is made for man (Genesis 2:18; Matthew 19:4, 5), then a person with same-sex attraction suffers from a privation of a good, i.e. the natural attraction to the opposite sex.

The words “gay,” “homosexual” and “lesbian” would seem to collapse someone’s identity into his or her sexual attraction. Measured either by justice or charity, that vocabulary is, at best, incomplete, if not a disservice to another person’s dignity.

Though we may hear one of our shepherds occasionally use this terminology so common in popular discourse, we should not assume that the Holy Father or any Church leader is implying the existence of a “third gender.”

The Church, in her magisterial documents, avoids these terms. Those words will also leave the person a puzzle to themselves, because, the intensity of his or her SSA notwithstanding, that person shares the same human nature every child of God has. Therefore, to accept a false story about oneself is to come into collision with oneself. No parent wants a child to suffer, especially if anything can be done to prevent it. By its nature, love tries to protect the beloved from harm, from pain and from sorrow. Doesn’t Jesus himself say, “No one has greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13)? The lover stands between the beloved and danger.

And yet, did not the Father say to the Son (Luke 22:42), “Will you drink the cup?” Did not the Father send the Son to “give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28)? While at the same time, did not the Son always remind us “poor banished children of Eve” of the goodness of the Father (Matthew 7:11; Luke 12:32)?

The life of Jesus and the Parable of the Prodigal Son give us confidence that suffering can be the source of redemption, of freedom, though it does not have the last word; that truth will prevail; that nothing lies outside the reach of grace; and that our Father is always good.

Father Paul Check is the executive director of [Courage](#).

I Was a Transgender Woman

By Walt Heyer

It was a pivotal scene. A mom was brushing a boy's long hair, the boy slowly turned his head to look at her. In a tentative voice, he asked, "Would you love me if I were a boy?" The mom was raising her boy to become a trans-girl.

In that split second, I was transported back to my childhood. I remembered my grandmother standing over me, guiding me, dressing me in a purple chiffon dress. The boy in that glowing documentary about parents raising transgender kids dared to voice a question I always wanted to ask. Why didn't she love me the way I was?

I am haunted by that boy and his question. What will the trans-kids of 2015 be like sixty years from now? Documentaries and news stories only give us a snapshot in time. They are edited to romanticize and normalize the notion of changing genders and to convince us that enlightened parents should help their children realize their dreams of being the opposite gender.

I want to tell you my story. I want you to have the opportunity to see the life of a trans-kid, not in a polished television special, but across more than seven decades of life, with all of its confusion, pain, and redemption.

The Trans-Kid

It wasn't my mother but my grandmother who clothed me in a purple chiffon dress she made for me. That dress set in motion a life filled with gender dysphoria, sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, and finally, an unnecessary gender reassignment surgery. My life was ripped apart by a trusted adult who enjoyed dressing me as a girl.

My mom and dad didn't have any idea that when they dropped their son off for a weekend at Grandma's that she was dressing their boy in girls' clothes. Grandma told me it was our little secret. My grandmother withheld affirmations of me as a boy, but she lavished delighted praise upon me when I was dressed as a girl. Feelings of euphoria swept over me with her praise, followed later by depression and insecurity about being a boy. Her actions planted the idea in me that I was born in the wrong body. She nourished and encouraged the idea, and over time it took on a life of its own.

I became so accustomed to wearing the purple dress at Grandma's house that, without telling her, I took it home so I could secretly wear it there too. I hid it in the back of a drawer in my dresser. When my mom found it, an explosion of yelling and screaming erupted between my mom and dad. My father was terrified his boy was not developing into a man, so he ramped up his discipline. I felt singled out because, in my view, my older brother didn't receive the same heavy-handed punishment as I did. The unfairness hurt more than anything else.

Thankfully, my parents decided I would never be allowed to go to Grandma's house again without them. They couldn't know I was scared of seeing Grandma because I had exposed her secret.

Uncle Fred's Influence

My worst nightmare was realized when my dad's much younger adopted brother, Uncle Fred, discovered the secret of the dress and began teasing me. He pulled down my pants, taunting and laughing at me. At only nine years of age, I couldn't fight back, so I turned to eating as a way to cope with the anxiety. Fred's teasing caused a meal of six tuna-fish sandwiches and a quart of milk to become my way of suppressing the pain.

One day Uncle Fred took me in his car on a dirt road up the hill from my house and tried to take off all my clothes. Terrified of what might happen, I escaped, ran home, and told my mom. She looked at me accusingly and said, "You're a liar. Fred would never do that." When my dad got home, she told him what I said, and he went to talk to Fred. But Fred shrugged it off as a tall tale, and my dad believed him instead of me. I could see no use in telling people about what Fred was doing, so I kept silent from that point on about his continuing abuse.

I went to school dressed as a boy, but in my head that purple dress lived on. I could see myself in it, standing in front of the mirror at my grandma's house. I was small, but I participated and excelled in football, track, and other sports. My way to

cope with my gender confusion was to work hard at whatever I did. I mowed lawns, delivered newspapers, and pumped gasoline. After high school graduation, I worked in an automotive shop, then took classes in drafting to qualify for a job in aerospace. After a short time, I earned a spot on the Apollo space mission project as associate design engineer. Ever eager for the next challenge, I switched to an entry-level position in the automobile industry and quickly rocketed up the corporate ladder at a major American car company. I even got married. I had it all—a promising career with unlimited potential and a great family.

But I also had a secret. After thirty-six years, I was still unable to overcome the persistent feeling I was really a woman. The seeds sown by Grandma developed deep roots. Unbeknownst to my wife, I began to act on my desire to be a woman. I was cross-dressing in public and enjoying it. I even started taking female hormones to feminize my appearance. Who knew Grandma's wish in the mid-1940s for a granddaughter would lead to this?

Adding alcohol was like putting gasoline on a fire; drinking heightened the desire. My wife, feeling betrayed by the secrets I had been keeping from her and fed up by my out-of-control drunken binges, filed for divorce.

Life as a Woman

I sought out a prominent gender psychologist for evaluation, and he quickly assured me that I obviously suffered from gender dysphoria. A gender change, he told me, was the cure. Feeling that I had nothing to lose and thrilled that I could finally attain my lifelong dream, I underwent a surgical change at the age of forty-two. My new identity as Laura Jensen, female, was legally affirmed on my birth record, Social Security card, and driver's license. I was now a woman in everyone's eyes.

The gender conflict seemed to fade away, and I was generally happy for a while.

It's hard for me to describe what happened next. The reprieve provided by surgery and life as a woman was only temporary. Hidden deep underneath the make-up and female clothing was the little boy carrying the hurts from traumatic childhood events, and he was making himself known. Being a female turned out to be only a cover-up, not healing.

I knew I wasn't a real woman, no matter what my identification documents said. I had taken extreme steps to resolve my gender conflict, but changing genders hadn't worked. It was obviously a masquerade. I felt I had been lied to. How in the world had I reached this point? How did I become a fake woman? I went to another gender psychologist, and she assured me that I would be fine; I just needed to give my new identity as Laura more time. I had a past, a battered and broken life that living as Laura did nothing to dismiss or resolve. Feeling lost and depressed, I drank heavily and considered suicide.

At the three-year mark of life as Laura, my excessive drinking brought me to a new low. At my lowest point, instead of committing suicide I sought help at an alcohol recovery meeting. My sponsor, a lifeline of support and accountability, mentored me in how to live life free from alcohol.

Sobriety was the first of several turning points in my transgender life.

As Laura, I entered a two-year university program to study the psychology of substance and alcohol abuse. I achieved higher grades than my classmates, many of whom had PhDs. Still, I struggled with my gender identity. It was all so puzzling. What was the point of changing genders if not to resolve the conflict? After eight years of living as a woman, I had no lasting peace. My gender confusion only seemed to worsen.

During an internship in a psychiatric hospital, I worked alongside a medical doctor on a lock-down unit. After some observation, he took me aside and told me I showed signs of having a dissociative disorder. Was he right? Had he found the key that would unlock a childhood lost? Rather than going to gender-change activist psychologists like the one who had approved me for surgery, I sought the opinions of several "regular" psychologists and psychiatrists who did not see all gender disorders as transgender. They agreed: I fit the criteria for dissociative disorder.

It was maddening. Now it was apparent that I had developed a dissociative disorder in childhood to escape the trauma of the repeated cross-dressing by my grandmother and the sexual abuse by my uncle. That should have been diagnosed and treated with psychotherapy. Instead, the gender specialist never considered my difficult childhood or even my alcoholism and saw only transgender identity. It was a quick jump to prescribe hormones and irreversible surgery. Years later, when I confronted that psychologist, he admitted that he should not have approved me for surgery.

Becoming Whole

Coming back to wholeness as a man after undergoing unnecessary gender surgery and living life legally and socially as a woman for years wasn't going to be easy. I had to admit to myself that going to a gender specialist when I first had issues had been a big mistake. I had to live with the reality that body parts were gone. My full genitalia could not be restored—a sad consequence of using surgery to treat psychological illness. Intensive psychotherapy would be required to resolve the dissociative disorder that started as a child.

But I had a firm foundation on which to begin my journey to restoration. I was living a life free from drugs and alcohol, and I was ready to become the man I was intended to be.

At age fifty-six, I experienced something beyond my wildest dreams. I fell in love, married, and began to fully re-experience life as a man. It took over fifty years, but I was finally able to unwind all the damage that purple chiffon dress had done. Today, I'm seventy-four years old and married to my wife of eighteen years, with twenty-nine years of sober living.

Changing genders is short-term gain with long-term pain. Its consequences include early mortality, regret, mental illness, and suicide. Instead of encouraging them to undergo unnecessary and destructive surgery, let's affirm and love our young people just the way they are.

*Walt Heyer is an author and public speaker with a passion to help others who regret gender change. Through his website, SexChangeRegret.com, and his blog, WaltHeyer.com, Heyer raises public awareness about the incidence of regret and the tragic consequences suffered as a result. Heyer's story can be read in novel form in *Kid Dakota* and *The Secret at Grandma's House* and in his autobiography, *A Transgender's Faith*. Heyer's other books include *Paper Genders* and *Gender, Lies and Suicide*.*

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