

MYTHS ABOUT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S TEACHING ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Adapted from "5 Myths about the Teaching of the Catholic Church on Homosexuality"

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Myth: The Catholic Church encourages a negative attitude towards people who identify as homosexual.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that persons with homosexual tendencies "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (CCC 2358). The Catholic Church continues Jesus' mission in offering salvation to all people including those with same-sex attractions.

The Catholic Church welcomes parishioners with same-sex attractions as God's beloved sons and daughters and strives to share with them the joy of the Good News of God's unconditional love.

Myth: The Church condemns persons with same-sex attractions and believes that persons with same-sex attraction should just "pray the gay away".

While the Catholic Church teaches that homosexual acts are morally unacceptable, the Church teaches that homosexual inclinations are not sinful in themselves. The Church recognizes that in a significant number of persons their homosexual desires are "deep-seated" and that these desires will accompany them throughout their life. The Catholic Church does not endorse an approach that requires all persons with same-sex attractions to become "straight" or heterosexual.

The Catholic Church teaches that God calls all persons, including those with same-sex attractions, to live the virtue of chastity. For persons with same-sex attractions, living chastely includes not engaging in homosexual acts. Since living the virtue of chastity for all Christians involves discipline and choosing not to indulge certain desires, the Church also encourages all Christians to persevere in this struggle by welcoming God's unending mercy and grace.

Myth: At a practical level, the living out of the teaching of the Catholic Church on homosexuality means that people with same-sex attraction will always be lonely.

The teaching of the Catholic Church encourages the virtue of chastity, which includes seeking a life filled with meaningful friendships and relationships. While these relationships ought not involve homosexual acts, Christ-centered relationships can offer opportunities for persons with same-sex attractions to share pure love with other persons. One important place where persons with same-sex attraction should be able to experience authentic friendships is their parish community. Members of parishes should make extra efforts to welcome persons with same-sex attractions so that they may form friendships that will provide mutual support on the path to Christian perfection.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has affirmed that the Church community is "a place where the person with a homosexual inclination should experience friendship. This community can be a rich source of human relationships and friendships, so vital to living a healthy life. In fact, within the Church human friendship is raised to a

new order of love, that of brothers and sisters in Christ" (Ministry to Persons with Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care).

Myth: The Catholic Church has no sympathy for the struggles of persons with same-sex attractions.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church emphasizes that persons with same-sex attractions experience a particular spiritual "trial" (CCC 2358). As Pope Francis has emphasized during this Year of Mercy, God's mercy is able to forgive all sins and God's grace accompanies all those who struggle to live up to the high standards of chastity. The Catholic Church teaches that persons with same-sex attractions "by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection" (CCC 2359).

Since all Christians striving to live the virtue of chastity often experience moments of weakness and frustration, Christians with same-sex attractions can provide a powerful and inspiring witness to other Christians of the beauty of genuine love that is perfected through sacrifice and persistent cooperation with God's grace. The witness of persons with same-sex attraction who genuinely strive to live chastely provides encouragement to persons of all sexual orientations to rely on the power of God's mercy and grace that make it possible to love in ways that are truthful and pure.

Myth: Pope Francis is going to change the teaching of the Catholic Church on homosexuality and eventually gay "marriages" might be recognized by the Catholic Church.

In Pope Francis' recent publication *Amoris Laetitia*, he underlined the teaching of the bishops at the recent synod who emphasized that "there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family" (AL 251).

The Catholic Church has consistently taught that God designed marriage to be a permanent and exclusive "one-flesh" union of love between one man and one woman that is open to life. The teaching of the Church is based on Sacred Scripture and the consistent teaching Tradition of the Church. The Church continues to repeat Jesus' teaching that defines marriage in terms of the one-flesh union of one man and one woman intended by the Creator "from the beginning" (Matthew 19).

Pope Francis has signaled the need for the Church to be attentive to the tone used to share challenging and sensitive Church teachings. Pope Francis has emphasized the importance of meeting people where they are, and accompanying them as they strive to grow in Christian virtue. Pope Francis has expressed the importance of sharing a message of mercy, truth, and accompaniment with those who are living lifestyles incompatible with a Catholic understanding of marriage and family life.