

HANDBOOK

FOR COURAGE AND ENCOURAGE CHAPLAINS

FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY EDITION



COURAGE
INTERNATIONAL

Handbook

for Courage and EnCourage Chaplains

Fortieth Anniversary Edition



Trumbull, Connecticut
2020

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Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care

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Handbook for Courage and EnCourage Chaplains

Fortieth Anniversary Edition

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In Loving Memory of

Father John F. Harvey, O.S.F.S.

(1918 – 2010)

Founding Director of Courage International

(1980 – 2008)



NOTIFICATION

The attached *Handbook for Courage and EnCourage Chaplains: Fortieth Anniversary Edition*, having received the endorsement of the Advisory Council and the Board of Directors of Courage International, was unanimously approved by the Episcopal Board of Courage International at a special meeting on 5 June 2020, and was thereby incorporated into the *Statutes of Courage International*, which state that

“[22.5] Chapter meetings of Courage International are to be conducted according to the Courage Handbook.”

The directives contained in this *Handbook* therefore apply to all chapters of Courage and EnCourage, and may be implemented immediately upon publication. This *Handbook* supersedes any previous editions and will be implemented by all English-speaking Courage and EnCourage chapters as of 26 September 2020, the fortieth anniversary of the first Courage meeting.

This *Handbook* will be translated into the various working languages of Courage International and will be implemented by the chapters using each language upon the approval and publication of the translation, or on September 26, 2020, whichever is later.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Rev. Philip G. Bochanski
Executive Director

19 June 2020

Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

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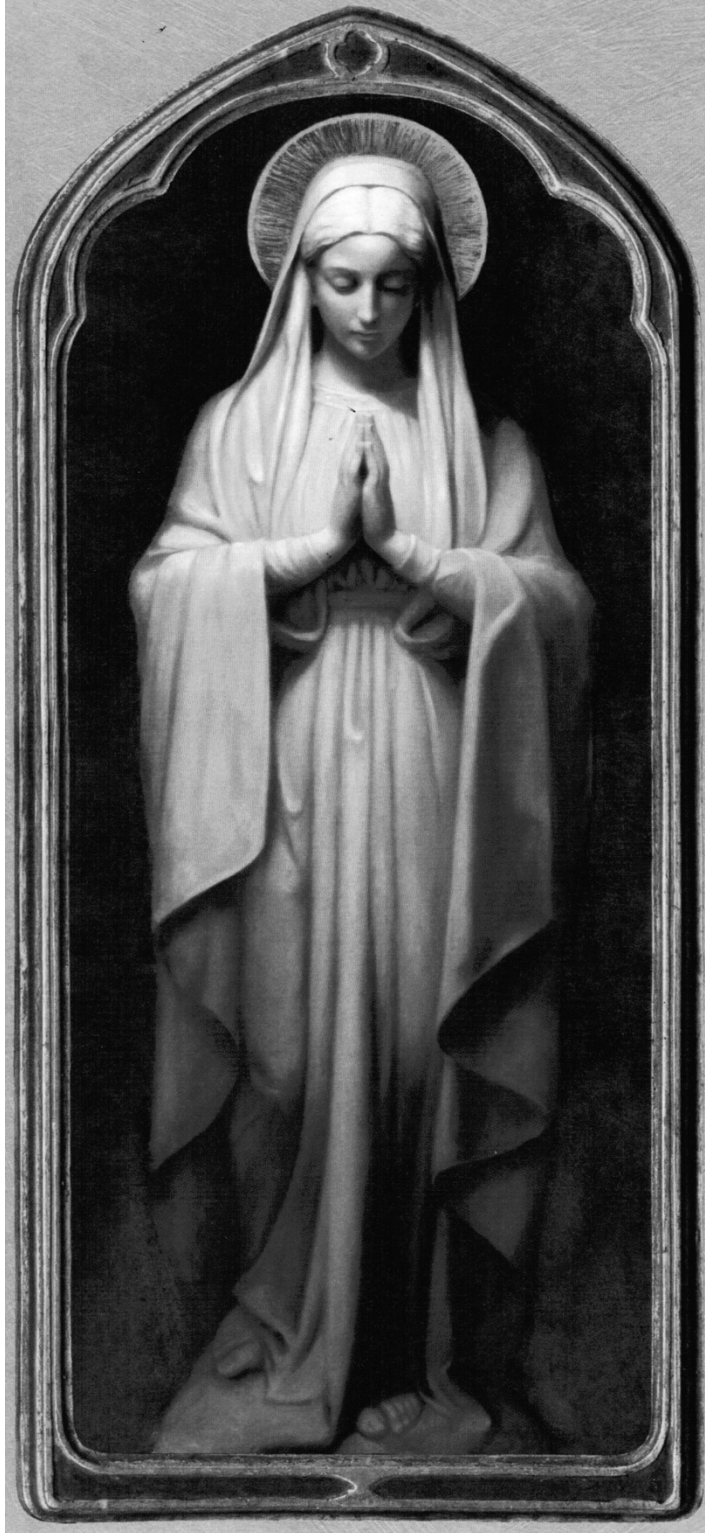
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Our Lady of Courage
by Gary H., a founding Courage member

Jubilee Prayer for the Courage and EnCourage Apostolates

Father of Mercy and Love,
we give You thanks for the many gifts
that we have received from Your Providence.

Above all, as members of Courage and EnCourage,
we praise and thank You for the rich legacy
You have entrusted to us through our founders.

Keep us faithful to the mission
that began in the heart of Father John Harvey:
to find our true identity in You,
to strive for chastity and for all the virtues,
and to speak the truth in love to the Church and to the world.

Bless our bishops and our chaplains,
and make them zealous and generous spiritual fathers.

Guide and protect our families,
and grant us healing and true charity.

Open our hearts to Your grace,
which strengthens us to embrace and live Your holy will.

Renew the bonds of sincerity and affection
that enable us to form authentic friendships
with You and with one another.

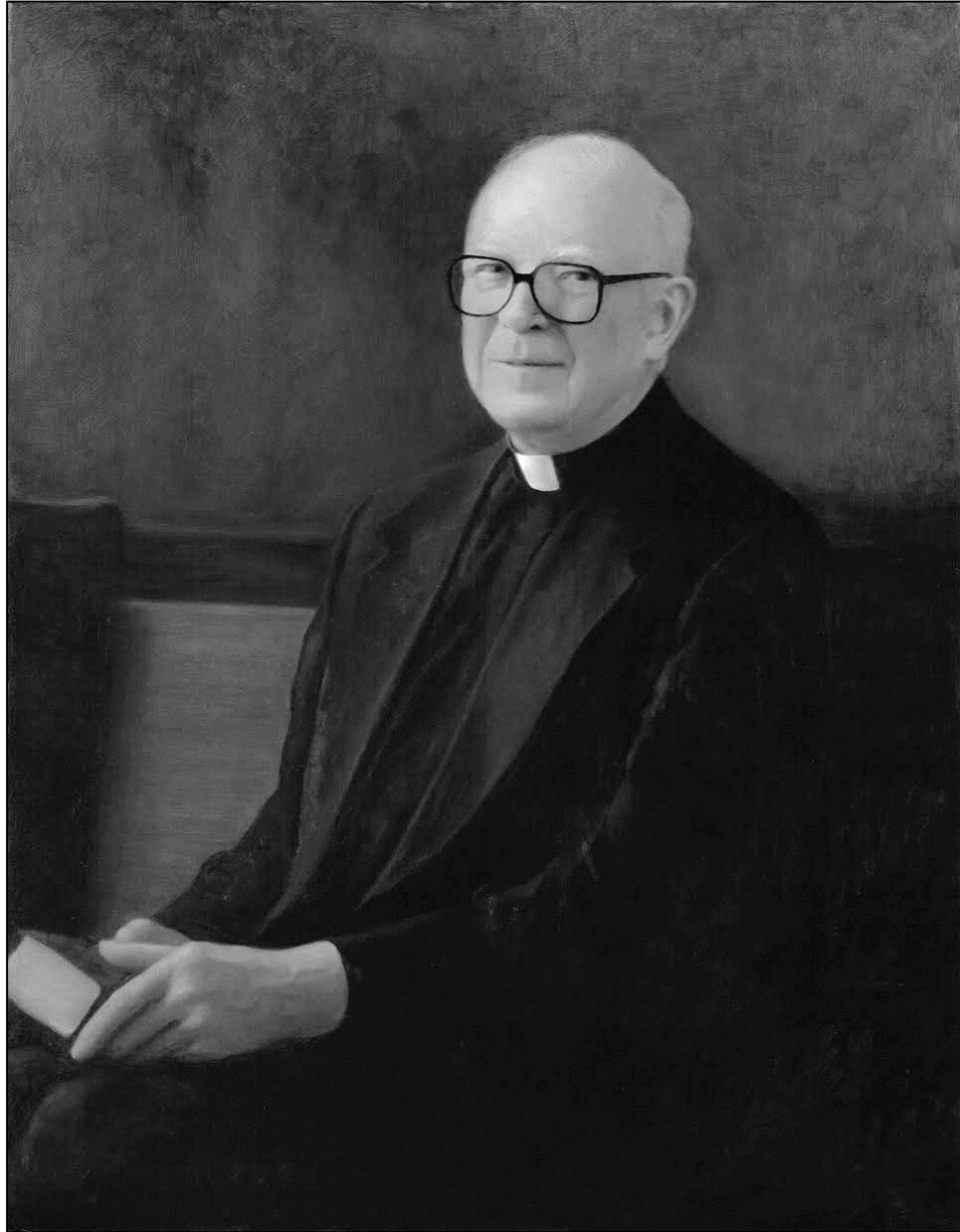
Make us truly Your sons and daughters,
and fill us with Your Holy Spirit,
that we may live as true disciples
of Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns forever and ever.

Amen.

Our Lady and Saint Joseph, pray for us.

Saint Charles Lwanga and his Companions, pray for us.

Saint Monica and Saint Augustine, pray for us.



Father John F. Harvey, O.S.F.S. (1918-2010)
by Gary H., a founding Courage member, 2018

Introduction

History of the Apostolate

The Goals of Courage & Encourage

The Structure and Governance of the Apostolate

Chapters and Chaplains

Father John F. Harvey, OSFS

The Courage apostolate was established in 1980 in New York, N.Y., at the initiative of Cardinal Terence Cooke (1921–83). In his ministry as Archbishop of New York, Cardinal Cooke had encountered a number of Catholic men who experienced same-sex attractions, and who wanted to move away from unchaste behaviors and relationships and to embrace the Gospel call to chastity. Many of these men had stopped practicing the Catholic faith and were looking for guidance to reconnect with the Church.

Cardinal Cooke asked Father John F. Harvey (1918–2010), an Oblate of Saint Francis de Sales, to provide pastoral care and spiritual support for members of the faithful of the archdiocese who were experiencing same-sex attractions. Father Harvey dedicated the remaining 30 years of his life to reaching out to these men and women and their loved ones, and to proclaiming the freedom and peace to be found in living a chaste life. In the process he became a friend and spiritual father to countless people, and created a priceless legacy for the Church.

John Harvey was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on April 14, 1918, the third of four siblings. His mother died when he was still a child, and his father provided for the spiritual and material needs of his young family with courage and generosity. Father Harvey often spoke of how the foundations of his Catholic faith, as well as his devotional and sacramental life, were set in the context of the love he experienced in his family, especially from his father. This burgeoning faith was fostered by his Catholic education, in the parish school of Saint Columba, and later at Northeast Philadelphia Catholic High School, staffed by the Oblates.

The Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales were founded in 1875 by Father Louis Brisson and Ven. Mary de Sales Chappuis. Drawing inspiration from the writings of Saint Francis de Sales, the community summarizes its spirituality in the motto “Live Jesus!” Father Harvey professed his first vows as an Oblate on September 8, 1937, making his perpetual profession three years later—and embraced the community’s devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and zeal for souls.

The Five Goals of Courage

1. To live chaste lives in accordance with the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality.
2. To dedicate our entire lives to Christ through spiritual reading, prayer, meditation, individual spiritual direction, frequent attendance at Mass and the frequent reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist.
3. To foster a spirit of fellowship in which we may share with one another our thoughts and experiences, and so ensure that no one will have to face the problems of homosexuality alone.
4. To be mindful of the truth that chaste friendships are not only possible but necessary in a chaste Christian life and to help one another in forming and sustaining them.
5. To live lives that may serve as good examples to others.

The *Spiritual Directory* of the Oblates, drawing on a text by Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, de Sales's friend and collaborator, says that "the intention of our holy Father was that our whole life and all our works be dedicated to union with God, so that we might assist in the renewal of the Church and the salvation of our neighbor by our prayer, works and good example, and that we might excel in every kind of virtue."¹

This intention formed the foundation of Father Harvey's own life of prayer and priestly ministry, especially his tireless dedication to the work of the Courage apostolate. It likewise is central to the spiritual legacy that he imparted to the apostolate.

The Five Goals of Courage²

Father Harvey had spent more than three decades studying and teaching moral theology by the time Cardinal Cooke approached

¹ *The Spiritual Directory of the Oblates of Saint Francis De Sales*, Official Text (February 1973), Part I, "Intention and Wishes of Our Father."

² Here and throughout the Handbook, and in the context of Courage meetings, the Five Goals are presented in the historical text written and adopted by the founding members of Courage, out of respect for their unique insights and contribution to the apostolate. Both in common usage in the apostolate, and in some documents of the Catholic Church, some of the language we use has changed over time. For example, it is more common for us to speak of

"a person who experiences same-sex attractions" than "a homosexual"; likewise, we would more commonly speak about experiences or challenges rather than "the problems of homosexuality" (Goal 3). Moreover, the reference point of all our work is the Church's teaching on the human person, sexuality and chastity, and not restricted to a few specific points "on homosexuality" (Goal 1). Such adaptations are addressed in the text of the Handbook, and the Goals should be explained to the members in this way, even as we retain the historical language.

The Five Goals of EnCourage

1. To grow spiritually through spiritual reading, prayer, meditation, individual spiritual direction, frequent attendance at Mass and the frequent reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist.
2. To gain a deeper understanding of the needs, difficulties and challenges experienced by men and women who experience same-sex attractions.
3. To establish and maintain a healthy and wholesome relationship with our loved ones who experience same-sex attractions.
4. To assist other family members and friends to reach out with compassion and truth to, and not to reject, their loved ones who experience same-sex attractions.
5. To witness to our loved ones by our own lives that fulfillment is to be found in Jesus Christ through His Body, the Church.

him about the new apostolate. He had counseled many lay people who were experiencing same-sex attractions, and in 1977 began leading retreats for priests and brothers in the same situation, helping them to overcome obstacles to living celibate chastity. In the context of those retreats, he worked with Father Benedict Groeschel, CFR, who recommended him to Cardinal Cooke as a leader for the ministry he had in mind. They were soon joined by a third collaborator, Father Edwin F. O'Brien (now a Cardinal himself), who was serving as personal assistant to Cardinal Cooke.

The first Courage meeting took place at Our Lady of the Rosary Parish (the Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton) in Manhattan on Friday, September 26, 1980. There were almost as many priest chaplains as laymen at

that first meeting, but the group grew steadily as it continued to meet weekly. The founding members themselves chose the name for the new apostolate. As a history written by a long-time Courage member relates:

Harvey G. was the designated leader of the group, and he asked the members to suggest appropriate names. ... He enclosed a list of over forty names including "The Different Way," "The Leading Edge," "Total Change," "The Way Out," "Celibate Crusade," "The Quest," "Reach Out," "The Truth," "Hope" and "Courage." ... That night, it seemed impossible to achieve a majority for any of the names. Harvey G. recalled that it was young Robert S. who settled things. ... In the midst of the heated discussion, Robert got everyone's attention and said

simply, “Courage! Courage is what we are, and we have to have courage.”³

After a few meetings, they set up a committee of five members to develop specific goals to guide their lives both as individuals and as a group. The fruit of their discussions—embraced and approved by Cardinal Cooke in the name of the Church—is found in the Five Goals that still guide the work of Courage around the world.

From that original small group in Manhattan, the Courage apostolate began to spread to other dioceses in the United States as well as to other countries. At the time of writing, there are 168 Courage chapters in 18 nations on five continents.

EnCourage

When a Courage chapter was formed in the Archdiocese of Toronto, Canada in 1985, positive press coverage brought the apostolate to the attention of the local church. Soon, parents and other family members whose loved ones were in homosexual relationships began to meet together for mutual support as well. Their particular struggle to stay true to the teachings of the Church while trying to keep family relationships intact was very familiar to Father Harvey, who often met with parents and spouses whom he encountered in his Courage work. Following the example of the Toronto chapter, similar groups were formed in other cities where Courage chapters were flourishing in the late 1980s. By 1992, these groups had adopted the name EnCourage.

³ James Beers, *Courage: A Ministry of Hope* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing, 2018), 28-29.

EnCourage chapters include not only parents but also spouses, siblings, grandparents and friends of people who experience same-sex attractions, many of whom identify as “LGBTQ.” They meet regularly—in most cases, monthly—with a priest chaplain and lay leaders for mutual support, and follow the same pattern as Courage meetings.⁴ Like the Courage apostolate, the EnCourage apostolate is guided by Five Goals, by which each chapter and each individual member strives to grow in holiness.

Courage International and the Courage Office

Courage International, Inc., exists in civil law as a non-profit corporation, incorporated in the State of Connecticut, where its central office is located. Courage International operates according to its by-laws and all applicable civil laws.

As an apostolate of the Roman Catholic Church, Courage International is a juridical person in Canon Law, and has Statutes that are confirmed by competent ecclesiastical authority. On November 28, 2016, Courage International was erected as a public clerical association of the faithful of diocesan right by the Bishop of Bridgeport, Most Rev. Frank J. Caggiano.

Ultimate and overall governance is the responsibility of an Episcopal Board, made up of diocesan bishops and archbishops who are familiar with and supportive of the work of the apostolate. Courage International also has a Board of Directors,

⁴ For a description of the meetings, see page 35, below.

composed of priests, deacons and lay persons who set the direction and scope of the work undertaken by the apostolate.

Day-to-day administration of Courage International is entrusted to an Executive Director, a priest selected by the Episcopal Board who serves with the permission of his diocesan bishop or Religious superior. The Executive Director is assisted by one or more Associate Directors (also priests) and by the staff of the Courage Office. Since 2018, the Executive Director has an Advisory Council, composed of Courage and EnCourage members, with whom he consults regularly to discuss initiatives undertaken by the Courage Office, and the needs and insights of Courage and EnCourage members.

Among his responsibilities, the Executive Director represents Courage in all public matters, safeguards the integrity and mission of Courage, oversees Courage's use of and engagement with the media, plays a key role in the process for admission of Chaplain members of Courage and—if required—also their dismissal from Courage, selects Chaplains to serve as National Coordinators and Regional Coordinators, and determines the venue for the Courage annual conference.

The Courage Office, from which the Executive Director and staff operate, serves as the contact point for all members of the Courage and EnCourage apostolates and their various chapters. It also serves as a resource and a support to individual Courage chaplains. The Courage Office is responsible for coordinating events when someone other than a

Courage chaplain intends to represent Courage and/or speak on its behalf in a public forum. Persons wishing to grant interviews, give talks (for example, at a parish event, a campus ministry or a young adult discussion group) or otherwise represent Courage should coordinate with the Courage Office, which can provide guidance and support.⁵

The Courage Office also provides resources and speakers for local continuing formation events, especially Clergy Study Days, which are offered to the priests and deacons of a diocese. A typical clergy study day comprises several talks on Christian anthropology and identity, the insights of the psychological sciences into homosexuality, the provision of authentic pastoral care to people who experience same-sex attractions, as well as a witness talk by a Courage member. Staff of the Courage Office also make similar presentations to gatherings of diocesan and/or parish staff, teachers and school ministers, and others involved in evangelization and pastoral care. Dioceses are encouraged to contact the Courage Office about these programs, particularly when a Courage or EnCourage chapter is being established, as they often help to raise awareness of the apostolate in the diocese and to make clergy more confident in referring potential members to the local chapters.

Courage Chaplains

The spiritual fatherhood of the Courage and EnCourage chaplain is a priceless benefit to the members of the local chapters, who

⁵ See also the appendix on page 76, below, on preparing and giving personal testimonies.

find in their chaplain the loving welcome and pastoral accompaniment that the Church offers to her sons and daughters. Although he may be assisted by deacons, Religious and/or lay collaborators, the chaplain of a Courage or EnCourage chapter is always a priest to whom his diocesan bishop has entrusted in a stable manner the pastoral care of people experiencing same-sex attractions (Courage) and/or the parents and other family members of people who identify as LGBTQ (EnCourage).

The choice and appointment of the Courage and EnCourage chaplain by the diocesan bishop is a sign of the bishop's pastoral solicitude for those under his care. The bishop should be careful to choose a priest who:

- is faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church, and able to express those teachings with clarity and fidelity, particularly the moral teachings of the Church on sexual ethics and homosexuality;
- lives priestly celibacy in a joyful, generous and faithful manner, so as to serve as a "sign of contradiction" in a sex-saturated world, and to be a model for those striving to grow in chastity;
- understands the basic principles of psychology as it relates to human development and pastoral counseling, and who is aware of the limits of his competency and knows how and when to refer to qualified mental health professionals;
- demonstrates affective and spiritual maturity, as well as prudence, compassion and patience in dealing with the struggles and limitations of others;
- is familiar with, and able to explain and evaluate, the various opinions of some theologians and social scientists on the subject of homosexuality, which may be opposed to the teaching of the Church, and is careful to guide the faithful away from erroneous teachings.

Often, a priest's assignment as Courage or EnCourage chaplain is a secondary or even tertiary assignment, taken on amid other pastoral duties including responsibility for a parish or other institution. The potential chaplain and his bishop should be prudent about the amount of time required to properly care for the members of the chapter, not only at the meetings, but also in terms of one-on-one availability for confession, spiritual direction, etc. A chaplain would do well to discuss his assignment with his bishop from time to time, especially in light of a change in primary assignment or other duties, to make sure that he is able, personally and practically, to continue in his ministry as a chaplain.

By virtue of his appointment by his bishop or superior, a priest chaplain becomes a member of the public clerical association.⁶

The Courage or EnCourage chaplain is the moderator of the local chapter, and serves as the point of contact among the

⁶ See *Statutes*, Part IV.

members, between the chapter and diocese, and between the chapter and the Courage Office. Where more than one chaplain serves in a diocesan chapter, one of the chaplains is established to serve as the moderator.

The chaplain moderates all meetings of the local chapter(s). Courage chapters should meet weekly if possible, and at least monthly; EnCourage chapters typically meet monthly. The chaplain may also invite other priests, deacons and seminarians to assist at meetings from time to time, to deepen their understanding of how best to provide pastoral care to people who are living with same-sex attractions. Chaplains should normally inform members that a guest priest will be attending, as some of them may know the guest from their parish or other contexts and may be uncomfortable revealing the fact of their belonging to Courage or EnCourage to him.

Prior to inviting them to a meeting, the chaplain meets individually with potential members who express an interest in joining a Courage or EnCourage chapter. The purpose of this initial interview is to ensure that the potential member understands the Five Goals of the apostolate, and is prepared to strive to keep them. When he is satisfied that the chapter is right for the potential member, and that the potential member is a good fit for the chapter, the chaplain informs the new member of the date, place and time of the meeting (which is otherwise kept private), and introduces him or her to the other members of the chapter.

The chaplain should be available to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) before or after each Courage meeting. He should also look for opportunities to celebrate Mass for the chapter periodically.

In particular cases, and with the consent of the diocesan bishop, the chaplain may seek the collaboration of deacons, consecrated men and women, and lay men and women, to assist in coordinating the chapter meetings. This may be particularly helpful in the case of EnCourage meetings, where married couples with long experience in their own families may serve a mentoring role for those who are just coming to terms with a loved one's same-sex attractions. However, it is only by way of exception that a chapter is entrusted for a long period to someone who is not a priest. In ordinary cases, the chapter is moderated by a priest chaplain, and he attends all the meetings.

When a new chaplain is appointed, he should contact the Courage Office to receive resources that will explain the duties of the chaplain and the plan for Courage and EnCourage meetings. He will also be invited to visit the Courage Office for several days to meet with the Executive Director and his staff, and to attend Courage and EnCourage meetings as a guest. This invitation is extended free of charge to new and veteran chaplains as the best way to help them understand their role. In some areas the outgoing chaplain and/or chaplains in neighboring dioceses also provide valuable support and guidance for new chaplains. New chaplains are also encouraged to

attend the annual Courage and EnCourage Conference (typically held in the summer) as well as periodic *Truth and Love* Conferences, designed for people in ministry.

Establishing a Chapter

As an apostolate of the Catholic Church, the local chapter of Courage or EnCourage is established with the consent of the diocesan bishop. Priests with an interest in beginning a Courage or EnCourage chapter and serving as chaplain should take the opportunity to make this desire and availability known to their bishop, either directly or through the offices of the diocesan administration (e.g., offices for Family Life, Laity or Clergy). People who are potential members of Courage or EnCourage, but do not have a chapter in their diocese, are likewise encouraged to write to the diocesan bishop or those who assist him, to let them know that the apostolate is needed, and to offer their prayerful support in establishing a chapter.

The local bishop should appoint one or more priests to serve as chaplains for Courage and EnCourage in the diocese. The diocesan process is similar to that of making other secondary assignments. The letter of appointment should direct the chaplain to contact the Courage Office for guidance in his new role. The diocese should send a copy of the letter of appointment to the Courage Office to be kept in the archive of the public clerical association.

Local dioceses are encouraged to publicize the foundation of the Courage and EnCourage chapters widely to both the clergy and the lay faithful. As previously

mentioned, a clergy study day is often an effective way to enlist the support of the local clergy. Other methods include word-of-mouth, parish bulletins, diocesan print and electronic media (radio, television, diocesan website), brochures that can be distributed to parishes and at diocesan events, and business cards that can be shared with priests to distribute in their offices or in the confessional.

The day, time and location of chapter meetings are always kept confidential. When the chaplain has had an initial interview with the potential member, and is satisfied that the potential member is a good fit for the chapter, and the chapter for him or her, he then informs the potential member of these details. This protects the privacy of all the members, some of whom have not revealed to others that they or their loved ones are experiencing same-sex attractions. Rather than post these details, the local chapter should publicize a dedicated phone number and email address at which potential members can reach the chaplain or a member of the chapter appointed to this responsibility, to receive information and arrange the initial interview. If someone else (e.g., a parish secretary) will answer this phone or email, he or she should have a basic understanding of the apostolate and be able to explain the process of meeting with the chaplain.

Individual chapters are not incorporated and do not have the same status in canon or civil law as Courage International. While individual chapters may accept free-will offerings into a petty cash account to provide for minor expenditures (such as rental of

meeting space, or local events like days of recollection), donors must be informed that these offerings are not classified as tax-deductible charitable gifts. Unless expressly established to the contrary, offerings given for the support of an individual chapter are presumed to be given to Courage International, Inc., and are to be forwarded, along with donor information, to the Courage Office. The donor may indicate that he is making a restricted gift to Courage International, and that the funds are to be used for the purpose of supporting a particular Courage or EnCourage chapter.

Chapters do not have their own insurance certificate. The ministry of Courage in a local chapter, along with the assumption of liability, comes under the direct supervision of the diocesan bishop. Chapters should coordinate with the diocese in matters involving liability insurance and similar concerns.

Members of Courage and EnCourage

Courage and EnCourage chapters are open to men and women who are 18 years old or older. Courage does not have groups for minors, as adolescence can be a time of fluidity and maturation in terms of understanding one's identity and the place of sexuality in one's life. Chaplains may find that young people who are experiencing same-sex attractions ask for advice and support, or

their parents ask on their behalf, given the chaplain's experience working with Courage. Chaplains may undertake these conversations, mindful of appropriate boundaries and standards for ministry to youth; however, it is understood that they do so not as Courage chaplains, but in the course of their own priestly ministry. Youth do not become Courage members as a result of such conversations. When appropriate, chaplains should also offer support to the parents and family of youth living with same-sex attractions, as well as formation for counselors, teachers and others involved in the young person's life. When counselors are involved, they "should be chosen carefully to ensure that they uphold the Church's understanding of the human person ...[and] conduct their work in a manner that accords with Church teaching."⁷

Courage members⁸ are those who are committed to living out the Goals of the apostolate: striving to live chaste lives, to develop a life of prayer, and to support one another through shared experience, friendship and good example. Membership in a chapter is open to persons who are not Catholic, but the chaplain should make clear that the meetings will include Catholic prayers, and that Courage is an apostolate of the Catholic Church.

A person who is not ready to embrace the teaching of the Church and to strive for

⁷ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*, 2006, p. 23.

⁸ In regard to the *canonical association*, the "members" of Courage International are the priests and bishops who serve the apostolate as chaplains and/or members of the Board of Directors or Episcopal Board. This canonical

distinction is required so that the executive director may be a priest appointed by the Episcopal Board. In common parlance, however, the "members" of Courage and EnCourage are those who agree to follow the Goals of Courage or EnCourage and take part in the apostolate through chapter meetings and/or online forums.

chastity, should not be invited to participate in chapter meetings until he or she is able to come to a deeper understanding and acceptance. Chaplains should offer personal support and guidance to such people as much as possible, and continue to meet with them until they are ready to participate fully in the chapter meetings.

If the prospective member seems to be seeking a place to debate and change the teaching of the Church, to meet an emotional or sexual partner, or to fulfill some other ulterior motive, the chaplain must be clear that the chapter meeting is not for him or her. Not only will the person not find what he or she is looking for, but his or her participation will hurt the cohesion of the chapter and the growth of the members.

When determining a person's readiness to join Courage and live the Goals, the chaplain should avoid harsh judgments, and apply the pastoral "law of gradualness" of which Saint John Paul II wrote in *Familiaris consortio*, which calls people

to progress unceasingly in their moral life with the support of a sincere and active desire to gain ever better knowledge of the values enshrined in and fostered by the law of God ... [and] to embody these values in their concrete decisions. They cannot, however, look on the law as merely an ideal to be achieved in the future: they must consider it as a command of Christ the Lord to overcome difficulties with constancy.⁹

EnCourage is open to parents, spouses, siblings, other relatives and friends of people who are experiencing same-sex attractions.¹⁰ More often than not, their loved ones living with same-sex attractions will *not* be members of Courage; rather, they are typically involved in same-sex actions and relationships, and often separated from active participation in the life of the Church.

Potential EnCourage members will come from a variety of perspectives and levels of experience, both in terms of their connection with the Church and the faith, and in the way that their loved one's experience of same-sex attractions is affecting their family. As explained above, the chaplain should interview potential members before inviting them to the chapter meeting. (He may also include an experienced member or couple to join in this initial interview.) Chaplains should be careful to explain that the primary focus of the EnCourage chapter is to support the members in their own lives of faith, and not to "fix" their loved ones.

From time to time the chaplain may wish to invite individuals with particular professional competence—theologians, spiritual directors, counselors, etc.—to attend part of the meeting to make a short presentation to the members about some aspect of the spiritual life, growth in chastity, family dynamics, or other such topics. It should be clear that these people, as well as diocesan staff and others who might assist in the promotion of the chapter, are *not* members of the

⁹ Pope St John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Familiaris consortio*, no. 34.

¹⁰ See the appendix on page 82, below, for a discussion of including people as EnCourage members whose loved

ones experience discordance about their sexual identity, and/or identify as "transgender".

chapter and should not attend on a regular basis. It would be disrespectful of the members to make them feel like they were on display or the subject of professional study or research. In any case, such guests should not attend the “check-in” portion of the meetings.¹¹ Members of Courage and EnCourage need the opportunity to speak freely among themselves and the chaplain, in their respective chapters, without outsiders present.

Collaboration with Other Groups

It is sometimes difficult to realize, after forty years, how unique Father Harvey’s new ministry was when it appeared in 1980. There were various Protestant ministries operating that offered care to people experiencing same-sex attractions, mostly from the perspective of eliminating those attractions: what today would be called an “ex-gay” approach. Among Catholics, the group Dignity had been formed a few years earlier, but that organization took a much different stance regarding the Church’s call to chastity. The approach of Courage—to live chaste lives and avoiding same-sex intimate acts, while acknowledging that to be attracted to the same sex is not a sin in itself, and no one is required to “become straight” in order to be holy—brought something new to the discussion.

In the early days of the apostolate, Father Harvey welcomed the leaders of various

non-Catholic religious and secular ministries to collaborate and share their experience in this area of pastoral care. At times these leaders made presentations at Courage conferences, usually because some Courage members had also participated in those other groups and asked Father Harvey to extend an invitation. Their presentations were usually followed by a lively discussion, and sometimes by a talk by Father Harvey in which he highlighted points of difference and corrected what he saw as errors in their approaches, if necessary.¹²

These collaborations were not always an unqualified success. On one hand, it would never have been possible for a Catholic apostolate to accept the objective of some groups to eradicate same-sex attractions entirely by spiritual or psychological means—often caricatured as efforts to “pray away the gay” or “conversion therapy.” On the other is the reality that some early collaborators went on to promote methods that are clearly unacceptable to a Catholic understanding of chaste boundaries,¹³ or even engaged in sexual relationships with those who had come to them for help.¹⁴

Although early versions of the Courage newsletter and website provided links to a number of non-Catholic and secular resources, including those which were problematic for the reasons just noted, Courage International does not endorse other groups

¹¹ See page 35, below, for an explanation of the “check-in.”

¹² See, e.g., the discussion of Colin Cook’s presentation to the 1990 Courage conference, in *Courage: A Ministry of Hope*, pp. 141-43.

¹³ E.g., the “holding therapy” promoted by Richard Cohen, Ph.D., or the group People Can Change. The latter group also publicly acknowledged employing nudity in some of

their events. Cohen was invited to speak at Courage conferences and his work was mentioned in one of Father Harvey’s books and on the Courage website.

¹⁴ E.g., Colin Cook, the founder of Homosexuals Anonymous. As mentioned above (footnote 12), Cook spoke at Courage conferences and was mentioned by Father Harvey in several of his books.

or ministries in any official or quasi-official way. Nor does Courage International endorse or authorize any books or other resources by authors who are not Catholic or whose work does not reflect the teaching of the Catholic Church on faith and morals, especially as it refers to sexual morality. When individual members of a Courage or EnCourage chapter wish to share their personal experience with an outside ministry, the member and the chaplain should make it clear that the individual is speaking for himself and that Courage International is not promoting the ministry or program. When a chapter is invited to participate in a local event with other ministries, the chaplain should consult with the Executive Director before accepting the invitation. Chapters that maintain local or regional websites or social media accounts should refrain from promoting or endorsing outside ministries or resources that have not been provided or specifically recommended by the Courage Office. Any questions in this regard should be referred to the Executive Director.

At no time should Courage chaplains or members—acting as a group rather than individuals, or identifying themselves as Courage or EnCourage members—take part in political demonstrations or activism. The main focus of Courage International is to provide pastoral care for its members, and formation to the clergy and those in ministry. Although the modern world has politicized questions of sexuality and sexual identity, and there are various legislative efforts underway that seem aimed at curtailing the Church’s ability to speak the truth in the public square, the response to the

political agenda comes properly from the bishops and their collaborators who lobby state and national governments. Courage International does not participate in activism or public protests, and its members and chaplains must likewise refrain from doing so when they would be seen as representing the apostolate. A request for an exception to this rule should be addressed to the Executive Director.

Courage and EnCourage chaplains must also be prudent when considering invitations for “dialogue” with national, diocesan or parish ministries that neglect the Church’s teaching on the moral nature of same-sex intimate relations, or are silent or ambiguous about the importance of chastity. As the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith pointed out in its 1986 *Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*,

No authentic pastoral program will include organizations in which homosexual persons associate with each other without clearly stating that homosexual activity is immoral. A truly pastoral approach will appreciate the need for homosexual persons to avoid the near occasions of sin.

We would heartily encourage programs where these dangers are avoided. But we wish to make it clear that departure from the Church’s teaching, or silence about it, in an effort to provide pastoral care is neither caring nor pastoral. Only what is true can ultimately be pastoral. The neglect of the Church’s position prevents homosexual men and women from receiving the care they need and deserve.

An authentic pastoral program will assist homosexual persons at all levels of the spiritual life: through the sacraments, and

in particular through the frequent and sincere use of the sacrament of Reconciliation, through prayer, witness, counsel and individual care. In such a way, the entire Christian community can come to recognize its own call to assist its brothers and sisters, without deluding them or isolating them.¹⁵

When those asking for a dialogue about the Church's teaching are sincerely open to stating that teaching clearly and finding ways to help people to follow it, such dialogue can be fruitful. But if such interactions require silence about the teaching, participation by Courage chaplains and members can cause

confusion among the faithful, and this must always be avoided.

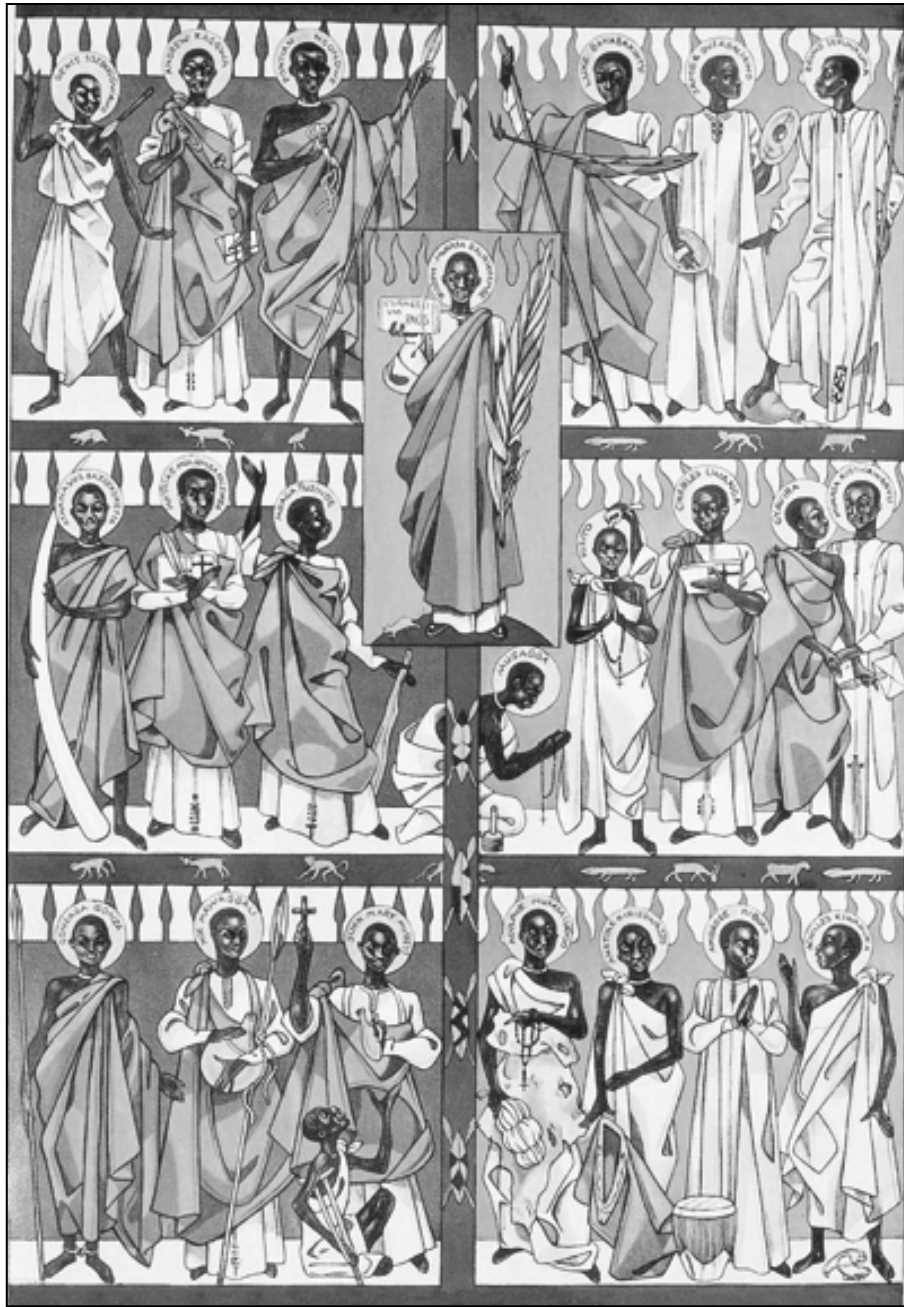
The chaplain should also prudently evaluate collaborations with Catholic ministries that uphold the Church's teaching about chastity, but are unclear about the terminology that the Church employs to present it. Concepts like "objectively disordered" and the difference between "being gay" and "experiencing same-sex attractions" need to be presented in a way adapted to the particular audience.¹⁶ But the goal should always be to use the terms that the Church uses and understand them more fully, rather than replacing them with alternative terminology.

¹⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to Bishops on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (1986), no. 15.

¹⁶ For a fuller discussion, see page 21ff, below.

Part One

The Goals of Courage



The Martyrs of Uganda, Saint Charles Lwanga and his Companions, the patrons of the Courage apostolate.

1

“To live chaste lives in accordance with the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching on homosexuality.”

Chastity

Chastity as Integration

“*Chastity* means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man’s belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman. The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrality of the gift.”¹⁷

The emphasis that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* places on integration as the hallmark of chastity is instructive for those who would lead others in the effort to live chastely. Many potential Courage members, like many people in the broader society, may have a limited view of what a “chaste life” entails, perceiving the Church’s expectations as a list of actions that are prohibited, rather than a plan for authentic freedom and human flourishing. While it is natural for

Courage chapter discussions to sometimes gravitate toward reports of being tempted and acting on these temptations, chaplains should try to situate these conversations within the broader context of integrated sexuality.

The following points are offered both to help the chaplain to understand and explain the teaching of the Church on sexuality and chastity, and as suggested starting points for discussion at Courage meetings.

Continence and Chastity

Considering issues of sexuality in the abstract, people often talk about “chastity” when what they mean is “continence.” While the distinction may be unfamiliar and seem subtle, it is an important one. Without it, it is easy to compartmentalize physical things from spiritual things, and to forget that a human being is a unity of body and soul, that all of a person’s decisions have to

¹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2337.

include striving for holiness both internally and externally.

“Continenence” is the virtue that avoids sexually intimate actions, recognizing that “sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.”¹⁸ Continenence is the minimum requirement for someone who is striving to live chastely. It recognizes that sexually intimate acts are reserved for married couples, so that people who are not married draw the line between signs of affection (hugs, hand-holding, kiss on the cheek) and actions that are arousing (passionate kissing, touching intimate parts of the body, etc.). Continenence also means avoiding masturbation, pornography and fantasy.

“Chastity” goes farther than continence and includes prudent judgments of feelings and desires, and a commitment to avoid acting on or encouraging feelings that will lead to temptations. Chastity recognizes that a life-long marriage between a man and a woman whose sexual relations are open to the transmission of new life is the unique context that God has created for the expression of love in a sexual way. A chaste person embraces this truth of faith and makes sacrifices to live it out.

A chaste person must be chaste with the body (continence), but also chaste with the heart and the mind. Chastity means not looking at people, or at images of people, with lust, and not dwelling on lustful thoughts that come from outside or inside.

It also means that a person is on-guard against letting the heart pursue daydreams and imaginings about making a life with someone who can never be one’s spouse.

When evaluating situations or relationships with a person to whom one is attracted, therefore, one cannot indulge strong emotions while presuming that he or she will be able not to act on them. It is never prudent to put oneself in a situation to be tempted—what is traditionally called the “near occasion of sin”—and to deliberately place oneself in the occasion of sin is a sin itself. Moreover, such an approach makes it seem like the body and the soul/heart are separate realities—“As long as we keep our hands off each other, I can love this person with erotic desire, or entertain the possibility of an erotic connection, and it will be fine.” Such a false dichotomy makes a life of virtue nearly impossible.

Types of Love

One of the most common cultural objections against the teaching of the Church is that the call to chastity discriminates against people with homosexual tendencies because it condemns them to lives without love. In reality, nothing could be farther from the truth. The human person is *made for love*: “Creating the human race in his own image ... God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion.”¹⁹ The objection comes from the tendency of the modern world to have a very

¹⁸ *Catechism*, no. 2351.

¹⁹ Pope Saint John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, no. 11.

limited view of love, equating it solely with sexual intimacy.

Ancient philosophers, on the other hand, recognized that there are various forms of love between and among people, each suited for a particular type of human relationship. These have been categorized in different ways through the centuries; in his book *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis provides a useful list:

- Affection (*storge*) is the natural love that parents feel for children, and vice versa; that binds siblings and other relatives; and that people feel for humans and animals that are vulnerable and in need.
- Charity (*agape*) is divine Love: the love with which God loves the human race, and which enables a person to love God in return and to love all those whom God loves.
- Passion (*eros*) refers to the love that wants to possess and be possessed by its object, the beloved. Eros exists to provide and facilitate the desire for union that enables spouses to commit themselves to the lifelong, exclusive relationship of marriage.
- Friendship (*philia*) binds two or more people together in their pursuit of a common interest or goal. Friendships may develop for a variety of reasons, both simple and sublime—including the desire to pursue holiness together and to grow in relationship with Christ who told his apostles, “I call you friends” (Jn 15:15).

An appreciation of the various kinds of love, particularly the “forgotten” love of friendship, reveals the truth that a life without sexual intimacy is far from being a life without love. It bears out the insight of the United States bishops, who wrote in 2006 that “true friendships are not opposed to chastity; nor does chastity inhibit friendship. In fact, the virtues of friendship and of chastity are ordered to each other.”²⁰ The call to sacrifice erotic connections does not inhibit a person’s ability to love and be loved; rather, it makes a more authentic expression of love possible.

(A discussion of the importance and nature of chaste friendships will be found later in this handbook, under the discussion of the Fourth Goal of Courage.)

Identity, Inclination, Action

The First Goal is “to live chaste lives *in accordance with the Roman Catholic Church’s teachings on homosexuality.*” A clear understanding of this teaching is essential for guiding Courage members toward a deeper understanding of themselves, of their temptations, and of what is expected of them.

Catholic teaching on homosexuality and the person who experiences same-sex attractions takes into account three realities: it has something to say about the human person and his or her *identity*; about the homosexual *inclination* as a lived experience, and its moral qualities; and about homosexual *actions* and the moral judgment that the Church makes on them.

²⁰ USCCB, *Ministry*, p. 11.

- *The person*: The Church considers a person who experiences homosexual attractions in light of his or her identity as a son or daughter of God, created good and in His image and likeness. Thus, the Church rejects attempts to define a person “by a reductionist reference to his or her sexual orientation.”²¹ “People should not be defined only by their sexual tendencies.”²² To make this point clear, Courage typically refers to “people who experience same-sex attractions” rather than “gay people,” or “LGBTQ people,” terms which could give the impression that same-sex attractions define a separate category or type of person with a different morality.²³
- *The inclination*: Emotions, attractions and desires—what the Church calls the passions—are natural parts of the human psyche, and are meant to draw a person toward the good and repel him from what is evil.²⁴ The effects of Original Sin, especially the tendency to sin known as concupiscence, mean that passions cannot always be taken at face value, or judged only by how strongly they are felt. Rather, passions must be evaluated by right reason, according to the actions they lead a person to desire.

Passions are properly ordered when they draw a person to good actions; they are morally disordered when they tempt a person to evil actions. The Church evaluates the homosexual inclination as “objectively disordered” in the particular sense that it inclines the person toward homosexual acts, which the Church teaches are always morally evil. However, “simply having the tendency is not a sin. Consequently, the Church does not teach that the experience of homosexual attraction is in itself sinful.”²⁵

- *The actions*: Catholic teaching on homosexual acts is clear: “Tradition has always declared that ‘homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.’”²⁶ The *Catechism* offers a three-part explanation for this judgment: “They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity.”²⁷ In other words, they lack the essential elements of fruitfulness and physical and spiritual complementarity that provide the context for truly conjugal acts.

²¹ CDF, *Letter*, no. 16.

²² Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy: A Conversation with Andrea Tornielli*, translated by Oonagh Stransky (New York: Random House, 2016), 84.

²³ Potential or new Courage members may prefer to use terms like “LGBTQ” or “gay” to describe themselves or their lives up to this point. Chaplains and other members should be patient with them, allowing them to express themselves freely and comfortably, while helping them to

understand why Courage prefers to use a different term. No one should be excluded or marginalized from the chapter because of the terms they use to refer to themselves.

²⁴ *Catechism*, nn. 1763–64.

²⁵ USCCB, *Ministry*, p. 5.

²⁶ *Catechism*, no. 2357, quoting CDF, *Persona humana*, no. 8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 2357.

The chaplain should carefully explain why and how the Church uses the terms “objectively disordered” and “intrinsically disordered.” This is not a psychological diagnosis of a mental disorder, and does not imply that the entire person is irredeemably broken. Rather, the Church refers to these “disordered” inclinations and actions to make clear that there is an “order” to Creation, a plan for sexuality and sexual intimacy that is implicit in the design of the human person. When the Church has to say “No” — to judge something as “disordered” — it is always part of pointing to a bigger “Yes,” to the order and the plan that lead to real human fulfillment and flourishing.

Strategies for Growth in Chastity

“In our society, chastity is a particular virtue that requires special effort.”²⁸ The chaplain should be prepared to help members of the chapter to persevere in their commitment to growing in this virtue. He should also be able to give counsel in regard to specific challenges to chastity.

The most effective gift that the chaplain has to share with the members of the local chapter may not be immediately obvious: he is, first and foremost, a spiritual father to those under his care. So many of the challenges to chastity in the modern day, particularly among people who are experiencing same-sex attractions and temptations, seem to be connected to emotional and relational wounds, particularly in the context of a person’s closest relationships. A real

relationship with the spiritual father will provide a good deal of healing and an alternative to the unhealthy approach of soothing these wounds through the fake relationships that pornography and promiscuity offer.

In addition, the chaplain will set an important example to the members of the chapter through his own generous, cheerful embrace of priestly celibacy. It is easy for the person striving to live chastely to become frustrated, especially when continence seems like an imposition rather than a free choice. When the chaplain is able to speak honestly about the freedom he finds in his celibate commitment, he will encourage others to embrace the Gospel call to chastity as well.

Chaplains should be honest with the members of the chapter about the necessity of asceticism—of that spirit of self-sacrifice that trains the body to be patient and keeps desires in their proper place. “Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom,” the *Catechism* advises. “The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy.”²⁹

Such asceticism is not to be interpreted too rigorously, as if a sufficient amount of effort and willpower is all that is needed to achieve the virtue of chastity. Likewise, “the passions ... do not simply have to be repressed in order for one to act morally.”³⁰ Rather, what the person living with same-

²⁸ USCCB, *Ministry*, p. 8.

²⁹ *Catechism*, no. 2339.

³⁰ USCCB, *Ministry*, p. 9.

sex attractions is striving for is that integration spoken of above: the ability to keep desires in proper perspective, to judge them properly, and to make free choices to follow the divine design for sexuality. "Repeated good actions will modify the passions that one experiences,"³¹ and the person will grow in freedom as he gains mastery over his thoughts and actions.

The chaplain will help the members of the chapter to persevere both by his cheerful encouragement and by his patience with those who are struggling. "The Christian life is a progressive journey toward a deepening of one's discipleship," the US Bishops advise, and "people do not all move forward at the same pace, nor do they always proceed in a direct line toward their goal."³² Without becoming lax or giving the impression that the goal of chastity is unattainable, the chaplain should be patient with those under his care, and help them to have the proper attitude of patience with themselves.

Pursuit of sexual gratification through masturbation, pornography use and promiscuity can quickly become the stuff of habit and even compulsion. Chaplains should be aware of the physical effects that self-gratifying behavior has on the brain and body, as well its effects on the spirit and will. A proper understanding will both help the person dealing with these things to be patient and committed to long-term change, and will highlight the importance of forming new good habits (virtues) to replace the bad habits.

The *Catechism* makes a particular application of the general moral teaching on culpability to the situation of someone who has developed a habit of masturbation. For the priest hearing confessions "to form an equitable judgment about the subjects' moral responsibility and to guide pastoral action," it says, he "must take into account the affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety or other psychological or social factors that lessen, if not even reduce to a minimum, moral culpability."³³ Again, this is not a matter of moral laxity or explaining away bad behavior, but simply a realistic assessment of the factors that limit a person's moral freedom. The same advice applies to similar issues like habitual use of pornography and promiscuous sexual encounters.

Therapeutic Assistance for Chaste Living

When a Courage member is dealing with behavior that has become truly compulsive, and seems connected to deeper psychological wounds and needs, the chaplain should recognize the limits of his own competence, and encourage the person to consider seeing a therapist or counselor who can address the underlying issues. Such professionals "should be chosen carefully to ensure that they uphold the Church's understanding of the human person ... [and] conduct their work in a manner that accords with Church teaching."³⁴

It is important to understand that the goal of such therapeutic intervention is to deal

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² USCCB, *Ministry*, p. 28.

³³ *Catechism*, no. 2352.

³⁴ USCCB, *Ministry*, p. 23.

with obstacles to living chastely. Such therapy is not to be confused with an attempt to “fix” or eradicate same-sex attractions (an approach commonly referred to as “conversion therapy”). The chaplain who deems it prudent to suggest therapy in an individual case should also make it clear that Courage does not ever require, provide or refer for any kind of therapy for any of its members.

The Gospel of John (2:25) notes that Christ knew the human heart very well, and the Church has always welcomed the insights of the medical, psychological and social sciences in acquiring a deeper understanding of the human person, who is a unity of body and soul.³⁵ There is no purely “spiritual” approach to holiness that does not also take into account the human mind, human relationships (especially the family) and the needs of the human body.

The authentic meeting point of spirituality and psychology with regard to same-sex attractions is in what might be called “chastity-based therapy.” This is very far from an attempt to “repair” or “fix” someone. Rather, those with a deep understanding of the way human beings think and relate to others have demonstrated many ways in which habits of coping with feelings or situations can make one more susceptible to temptations or more likely to seek gratification in ways that are not good for him or her.

Some people find that, in addition to spiritual direction and the sacraments, an ability to talk about their experiences and their

present situation with someone who understands these ways of coping, thinking and acting — well-trained, ethical psychologists and therapists — gives them insights that help them in their striving to be chaste. Courage respects the decisions some of its members make to seek the assistance of qualified professionals for a better understanding of themselves, their ways of seeing the world, and their relationships, all of which can aid in the daily battle for holiness and chastity. However, Courage meetings are not group therapy, and no Courage member is required to seek counseling or treatment of any kind.

The Particular Needs of Men and Women

God created men and women equal in dignity and complementary in nature—that is, each sex has its own physical, emotional and spiritual uniqueness and difference that is good and willed by God. The complementarity of the sexes, which Pope Francis has called “a great treasure ... not only an asset but also a thing of beauty,”³⁶ is meant in the natural order to draw each person out of himself or herself toward the other. It should not be surprising, therefore, to note that, even in terms of same-sex attractions, men and women have different experiences and face different challenges.

The observations of Courage chaplains over many years have led to the conclusion that men and women who experience same-sex attractions engage in romantic

³⁵ Cf. CDF, *Letter*, no. 17, and USCCB, *Ministry*, p. 7.

³⁶ Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the International Colloquium on the Complementarity Between Man

and Woman Sponsored by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (17 November 2014), no. 1.

relationships from different perspectives. Speaking very generally, men who experience same-sex attractions tend to be drawn first to the physical qualities and the outward appearance of the men who are objects of desire. It seems that many times they are attracted by qualities in the other that they perceive to be lacking in themselves—a particular look or physical attribute, a personality trait or ease of interaction, etc. Many men struggle with pornography and promiscuous sexual encounters, which are often temporary, and may even be anonymous. Chaplains should be particularly attentive to the impact this behavior has on members in terms of habit and freedom, as has already been mentioned.

Same-sex relationships among women, on the other hand, tend to begin with a deep friendship, which becomes more intimate and romantic, and eventually physical/sexual. These relationships can tend to become very emotionally entangled, with elements of possessiveness, exclusivity and jealousy. While women can also become attached to pornography, masturbation and promiscuity, much of the help they need to live chaste

lives will be in terms of understanding appropriate boundaries in relationships, and appreciating the difference between friendship and *eros*.

Given the differing challenges faced by men and women, and the need for modesty in discussing sexual matters, a Courage chapter will ideally provide opportunities for separate meetings for men and women. This is not to say that they should never mix; in fact, interaction between the sexes can provide healing and modeling of gender roles for both groups. This is especially beneficial in terms of social gatherings and opportunities for prayer and reflection. But the two groups should have regular separate meetings to discuss experiences and challenges, if there are enough women for separate meetings to be held. If a potential woman member feels uncomfortable being the only woman in an all-men's chapter, she may wish to meet one-on-one with the chaplain instead. But a woman should never be turned away from a Courage chapter simply because she would be the only woman attending.

2

“To dedicate our entire lives to Christ through service to others, spiritual reading, prayer, meditation, individual spiritual direction, frequent attendance at Mass, and the frequent reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist.”

Prayer and Dedication

A Spiritual Plan

“The purpose of a plan of life is to give direction to one’s life within the context of Christian faith,” Father Harvey wrote. “[It] is not a rule of thumb, not ten easy steps to happiness, but a radical rethinking of an inadequate view of life. It is a deep determination to redirect the will in the pursuit of God; it leads to the gradual formation of systematic practices which are designed to help the homosexual [person] to fulfill these thought-out objectives.”³⁷

The First Goal of Courage, to live chaste lives, is supported by the other four, and in particular by the Second Goal, the development of a life of prayer, a spiritual plan. The person who experiences same-sex attractions, Father Harvey explains, “often senses the loneliness and incompleteness of” homosexual relationships, but “the idea of living alone in the world may not even occur to him, or, if it does, it seems bleak as the

Sahara desert. In this situation, [he] needs strong spiritual direction, a plan of life, and the friendship of other devout persons.”³⁸

The Five Goals are presented with the language and phrasing chosen by the first Courage chapter, and the Second Goal may seem to be a buffet of pious practices from which one can pick and choose. Each of the parts of the Second Goal has its own importance in the overall spiritual plan of the Courage member, and there is an internal logic to their ordering and relationships. We will consider each of them in turn.

Service to Others

For a person striving to grow in holiness, it is not enough to avoid vice; he or she must also grow in the virtue that is opposed to that vice. This is usually accomplished by making specific sacrifices that require practicing the virtue. So, a person who habitually

³⁷ Father John Harvey, OSFS, *A Spiritual Plan to Redirect One’s Life* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1979), 10.

³⁸ *Spiritual Plan*, 6.

loses his temper with a co-worker can grow in patience by spending *more* time with that co-worker, and striving to see his good qualities. A person who finds herself being avaricious and stingy can grow in generosity by looking for specific opportunities to give money or time, beyond what she would normally do.

When striving to grow in chastity and avoid sexual impurity, the pattern is somewhat different. Continence particularly refers to *not doing* things, to avoiding sexually intimate thoughts and actions. So, what is the opposite good action that is to be done? The answer seems to be charity, specifically works of service to others.

The various forms of unchastity with which Courage members typically struggle – fantasy, masturbation, pornography, promiscuous encounters – have this in common: they are self-oriented. They use the sexual faculty, and use another person, to gratify the self and one's own desires. The nature of homosexual attractions – that they are specifically directed to a person of the same-sex as oneself – can intensify the self-oriented nature of the temptations. The way to combat them, then, is to focus on others rather than on oneself.

Seeking to serve others rather than seek one's own satisfaction has several good effects. First, it increases a person's ability to recognize Christ's presence in one's own life, by requiring one to seek Christ in others. One serves others because he or she is commanded to see Christ in them: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt

25:40). It likewise helps a person to recognize the action of grace in his or her own life, as opportunities to serve one's family, friends and acquaintances reveal the plans of Divine Providence. Service reveals the gifts that one has received from God, as these gifts are called into action in particular situations. Corporal works of mercy, specifically, also help a person to develop a chaste attitude toward his or her own body and the bodies of others, as they attend to the very basic needs of the body of another (food, clothing, shelter, presence) out of love for Christ rather than for gratification.

Courage chaplains should encourage members to be attentive to opportunities to be of service to the people they encounter in their daily lives, as well as to plan more regular times for service in programs organized by the parish or the community. It would also be useful to plan service projects from time to time that the members of the chapter can undertake together as a group. Collecting and distributing gifts at Christmas, doing maintenance projects for the parish that hosts the meetings, preparing and serving a meal at a local soup kitchen or shelter, or other such projects can draw the chapter closer together and inspire them to other works of charity. For many years, Father Harvey would pass his hat at the end of his Courage meetings to collect money that would be donated to a Catholic charity that the members chose.

Spiritual Reading

"It is very useful," Saint Philip Neri used to say, "to read the works of authors whose

names begin with *S*, such as Saint Augustine, Saint Bernard, etc.” Just as works of service take the Courage member’s attention off his own desires and makes him more attentive to the needs of others, a habit of reading good spiritual books helps to show him that his own story of conversion, grace and vocation is situated within the larger story of those who followed Christ in every time and place. “The witnesses who have preceded us into the kingdom, especially those whom the Church recognizes as saints, share in the living tradition of prayer by the example of their lives, the transmission of their writings, and their prayer today,” the *Catechism* notes.³⁹ Spiritual reading, like many of the practices and attitudes embodied in the Five Goals, helps to solidify the community spirit that is so necessary to the Christian life.

The Church’s vast treasury of spiritual books, both traditional and modern, provides something for every taste, every situation and every need. At times the breadth of selections can be overwhelming to someone just starting out, so the chaplain should have some recommendations available for the members of the chapter, always keeping in mind the need to tailor his suggestions to the individual. Books that deal with themes like conversion, grace, chastity and the lives of the saints will all be helpful.

It may also be useful, from time to time, for the chaplain to suggest a book that all the members can read together, and can discuss either as part of the regular meeting or at another time. Leading this discussion will require special care, to make sure that it does

not become simply an intellectual exercise. Spiritual reading is not an end in itself, but a means to help members become more aware of the power of grace in their own lives, and to understand their own stories more deeply by sharing the insights and stories of others.

Prayer

The fourth part of the *Catechism* provides a full treatment of the subject of prayer – methods, motives, times and places, fruits – and concludes with a beautiful meditation on the Lord’s Prayer. A Courage chaplain should surely be familiar with the content of this section of the *Catechism*, and be himself a man of prayer, so that he can be a teacher of prayer to the members of the chapter.

The *Catechism* holds up Moses as “the most striking example” of prayer, especially the prayer of intercession, which Moses offered repeatedly for the people he was called to lead.⁴⁰ The conversations between the Lord and Moses that are recorded in Scripture demonstrate an essential element of prayer for Courage members: that *intimacy* with God that allowed Moses to share honestly all of his trials, doubts and concerns, and which lead the sacred author to remark that “the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex 33:11).

Prayer that is not honest is a waste of time and energy. The words may sound very pious, be objectively correct, even beautiful – but if a person does not converse honestly with God about the actual circumstances of his or her life, the

³⁹ *Catechism*, no. 2683.

⁴⁰ *Catechism*, no. 2574.

transformation and growth that are the fruits of prayer will be lacking. A person who carries great amounts of guilt and shame, and is dealing with long-term habits of sin that are difficult to break, almost always finds it difficult to pray, out of fear that God will reject the prayer, or will want to converse with the person about the very thing he or she is not ready to change. The Courage chaplain who speaks often of God's mercy, and of each person's need to ask for grace and help, will assist those under his care to pray more honestly.

Father Harvey's spiritual patron, Saint Francis de Sales, reminds us that prayer is versatile and conformable to the needs and circumstances of each individual. "The practice of devotion must be adapted to the strength, to the occupation and to the duties of each one in particular. ... In fact, if it ever works against, or is inimical to, anyone's legitimate station and calling, then it is very definitely false devotion."⁴¹ The mother of a family does not have the same prayer life as a cloistered nun; someone working in an office cannot have the same devotional life as a monk with a vow of silence. But the rich devotional life of the Catholic Church provides a wonderful diversity of methods and "styles" of prayer suited to each one. Courage International does not prescribe any particular type of prayer or devotion, and while it will always be appropriate for the Courage chaplain to discuss types and methods of prayer with the whole chapter during the meeting, he will also need to make time for

each member to work on adapting and specifying the type of prayer to his or her needs and circumstances.

Meditation

In addition to vocal and liturgical prayer, meditation is an important part of spiritual growth. In it, the *Catechism* explains, "the mind seeks to understand the why and how of the Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking."⁴² It "engages thought, imagination, emotion and desire"⁴³ and reflects on "the Sacred Scriptures ... holy icons, liturgical texts of the day or season, writings of the spiritual fathers,"⁴⁴ and other things that bring to mind the plan and the presence of God. The Courage chaplain should help members to understand the importance of meditation, and provide good resources and his own guidance to help them to grow in this type of prayer.

In addition to the Scriptures and spiritual books, meditation also can take for its subject "the book of life."⁴⁵ Courage members should be encouraged to devote time each day to what Saint Ignatius of Loyola called the *examen* – a careful consideration of the day, hour by hour, that pays attention to the work of grace and one's response to it. This is more than an examination of conscience that seeks to identify one's own sins, although this awareness of sin is part of it. More importantly, the daily *examen* looks for the work and presence of God in one's daily life – actual graces received; invitations to

⁴¹ Saint Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, I.3.

⁴² *Catechism*, no. 2705.

⁴³ *Catechism*, no. 2708.

⁴⁴ *Catechism*, no. 2705.

⁴⁵ *Catechism*, no. 2706.

sacrifice or to take a step in one's vocation; a word of encouragement or consolation that came at the right time; help to make the right choice to do good and avoid evil. This daily habit of meditating on the events of the day that has passed deepens a person's awareness of his or her need for God, and of the way that God responds to that need. Over time, it increases a person's awareness of God's presence and action at the time it is happening.

"There are as many and varied methods of meditation as there are spiritual masters," the *Catechism* admits,⁴⁶ and here again the chaplain should be attentive to the needs and situation of each individual rather than trying to fit everyone into the method with which he himself is most familiar.

Individual Spiritual Direction

It seems at times that many types of relationships are lumped together under the heading of "spiritual direction" – pastoral counseling, regular confession, mentoring or what in a secular context might be called "life coaching." Spiritual directors, however, have a very specific role to play: to be "guides for prayer" and "servants of prayer."⁴⁷ The conversations that one has with his or her spiritual director should generally be about one's conversations with God in prayer. The role of the director is to assist the directee to discern the Will of God

in the concrete circumstances of his or her life.

As mentioned earlier, a priest is typically assigned as a Courage chaplain in addition to his primary responsibilities as a parish priest, campus or institutional chaplain, or other ministry. While the chaplain should make every effort to be available to see the members of his chapter for spiritual direction if they request it, his busy schedule may not permit him to accommodate every request. Chaplains are encouraged to develop an informal network of brother priests whom they know to be faithful and compassionate, to whom they can refer members for spiritual direction when the need arises.

Chaplains, of course, should themselves have a spiritual director with whom they can share the joys and challenges of this ministry, and receive guidance and encouragement in their work to guide others. "For as the master is, so will the disciple be, and as the father is, so will be the son," Saint John of the Cross insists. "If the spiritual director has no experience of the spiritual life, he will be incapable of leading into it the souls whom God is calling to it, and he will not even understand them."⁴⁸

Frequent Attendance at Mass and Frequent Reception of the Holy Eucharist

The advantages of attending Mass frequently should be obvious. A deeper exposure to the Word of God, and deeper

⁴⁶ *Catechism*, no. 2707.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Catechism*, nn. 2683, 2685.

⁴⁸ Saint John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, stanza 3.30, in *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, eds. K.

Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), 621.

immersion into the life of the parish community, are both available to the person who is able to attend daily Mass. A commitment to attending every day or several days a week creates discipline and order in a person's life, and attunes him or her more to the liturgical seasons of the life of the Church. It often provides an opportunity for asceticism (especially if daily Mass is celebrated early in the morning), and a motivation to avoid habits of serious sin so as to be able to receive Holy Communion.

Frequent attendance at Mass often provides a greater impetus for intercessory prayer, not only for the needs of one's immediate family or circle of friends, but for the larger community of the parish and diocese. It is also an opportunity for prayer for oneself, and for offering one's sacrifices and sufferings to God. "For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors ... their daily occupations ... and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become 'spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Pt 2:5). Together with the offering of the Lord's body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist."⁴⁹

The fruits of Holy Communion are many, and are intimately linked with the life of the disciple and the call to continuing conversion. "Holy Communion augments our union with Christ ... preserves, increases and renews the life of grace ... separates us from sin ... wipes away venial sins ... revives our love and enables us to break our disordered attachments to creatures," and

"preserves us from future mortal sins."⁵⁰ Needless to say, Courage chaplains should strongly encourage their members to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion as often as possible. From time to time, he should offer Mass for and with the chapter, either in conjunction with a regular meeting or at another convenient time. The original Courage chapter celebrated Mass together on the First Friday of each month for many years.

Frequent Reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Among the many responsibilities of the Courage chaplain, being available to hear the confessions of the chapter members holds pride of place. "Through [confession] a man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible."⁵¹ From the days of the first Courage chapter, offering the Sacrament of Reconciliation has always been part of each chapter meeting.

It is not easy to "look squarely" at one's own sins, least of all at sexual sins and habits that can provoke a great deal of embarrassment, guilt and shame. Still, it is necessary to confess serious sins "even if they are most secret," the *Catechism* says, "for these sins sometimes wound the soul more grievously and are more dangerous than those which are committed openly."⁵² So the availability of the chaplain, whom the members can trust to understand them and to be patient

⁴⁹ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, no. 34.

⁵⁰ *Catechism*, nn. 1391-95.

⁵¹ *Catechism*, no. 1455.

⁵² *Catechism*, no. 1456.

and compassionate, is essential to their ability to grow and be healed. "If the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor," Saint Jerome wrote, "the medicine cannot heal what it does not know."⁵³

Not every member will necessarily wish to confess to the chaplain, so here again it is good for the chaplain to have a network of faithful and compassionate priests whom he can recommend as confessors. (This is also important when the chapter meeting is led by a deacon or lay person in the absence of a priest chaplain.) The key is to encourage the members to make frequent *regular* confessions: that is, as much as possible, to go to the same confessor rather than moving around from church to church. This practice helps a person to overcome embarrassment and to face the reality of habitual sins, since (especially when the penitent goes "face-to-face" or otherwise shares his identity with the confessor) both priest and penitent are developing a long-term relationship to each other and a long-term understanding of the underlying obstacles to conversion and purity of heart.

Chaplains should be alert to signs that bad habits have become addictive behaviors, or that a person is acting compulsively or obsessively. We mentioned above⁵⁴ the importance of making good judgements about a person's moral culpability, which can be diminished by various emotional and psychological factors. A chaplain should also consider whether a member's practice of confession has become, so to speak, a part of the addictive cycle. That is, tension builds in a person's life, which is alleviated (but not addressed or changed) by masturbation or other sexual acts. Then guilt overwhelms the person, which is alleviated (but not addressed or changed) by a quick, perfunctory confession. Soon the cycle continues since – notwithstanding the reality of sacramental grace – the person has not really faced the desires or pressures that underlie the bad habit. In such a case, it would be helpful for the chaplain to suggest that the member develop a trusting relationship with a priest with whom he can discuss these bad habits and addictive behaviors, even outside the setting of sacramental confession.

⁵³ Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, 10,11: PL 23, 1096.

⁵⁴ See page 24, above.

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“To foster a spirit of fellowship in which we may share with one another our thoughts and experiences, and so ensure that no one will have to face the problems of homosexuality alone.”

Fellowship

The Importance of the Courage Chapter

The spiritual fatherhood of the chaplain, and his ability to provide counsel through one-on-one interaction and spiritual direction, are not to be underestimated, and his ability to impart the sacraments of the Church is irreplaceable. But this individual relationship, important as it is, is not enough for the person seeking to grow in self-understanding and chastity. “There can be little hope of living a healthy, chaste life without nurturing human bonds,”⁵⁵ as the US Bishops point out, and this is the reason for the particular group dynamic that forms the heart of the Courage apostolate.

There is a power in groups that cannot be found in individual striving. The Courage group process, which emphasizes individual self-searching in the presence of others who are engaged in the same struggle, opens the person to healing. No one person (chaplains included) can truly move a struggling

or suffering person to wholeness as can the total impact of the supportive group.

When persons experiencing same-sex attractions become involved in a Courage support group, they learn that their struggles are not unique to themselves, but common to all who are participating. The sense of isolation one might feel with his or her attractions toward persons of the same-sex is dissipated, and the paralyzing effects of shame are diminished, when the member is able to disclose struggles and failings and receive not condemnation but support and encouragement to keep striving. When one group member can speak honestly about his or her challenges and successes, it encourages other participants toward self-disclosure as well. Even the slightest articulation of an individual’s growth provides strength to all the group participants and confirms their hope for chastity and peace of mind. One senses that it is possible to achieve

⁵⁵ USCCB, *Ministry*, p. 10.

chastity, when previously she or he had heard or experienced only the impossibility of living out Christ's will.

It is not uncommon to hear Courage members state that they feel stronger being in the chapter. Before joining the chapter, they often felt discouraged or confused, but now they have greater clarity and optimism about themselves and the road ahead of them. Many members report that the presence of the Holy Spirit is palpable; that this Presence assures them they are not asked to struggle alone but to persevere with God's powerful help.

The Typical Courage Meeting

Whenever possible, Courage chaplains should arrange for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) before or after each meeting. This should obviously be done in the church or another private, appropriate setting separate from the meeting room, and should facilitate both anonymous and face-to-face confessions.

When the chapter has gathered, the chaplain or a member leads an **opening prayer**. Appropriate prayers may include the *Serenity* prayer,⁵⁶ the *Memorare*, the prayer *Come, Holy Spirit*, or the collect given in the Roman Missal for the Mass for Chastity.⁵⁷ These are suggestions, however, and the chaplain is free to offer a spontaneous prayer or choose another text suitable to the liturgical season, the devotion of the chapter, etc.

Next, **the Five Goals are read**. By a long-standing tradition, usually five members are each asked to read one of the Goals.

Then the chaplain begins the meeting with a **short reflection**. This may be a consideration of one of the Five Goals, or one of the Twelve Steps.⁵⁸ However, the chaplain is free and encouraged to expand his reflections beyond the specific topic of chastity, to include other aspects of the spiritual life: growth in the theological and cardinal virtues, the life of Christ and of the saints, the Church's liturgical and devotional life, and other such topics. From time to time it will be useful to review the moral teaching of the Church; the fundamentals of Christian anthropology, identity and vocation; and even to consider the insights of the psychological and social sciences toward a deeper understanding of same-sex attractions. The chaplain can also use this time to teach the chapter a method of prayer and meditation, and to give counsel on appropriate ascetical practices. (A recommended reading list is included as an appendix to this Handbook and may provide useful reference and inspiration for these talks by the chaplain.)

Each member is then invited to speak for a short time (perhaps 3 to 5 minutes) uninterrupted; this is sometimes known as "**checking in.**" This may be a simple statement of what has been going on in the person's life since the last time he or she attended a meeting. It should focus not only

⁵⁶ Written by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971). It will be familiar to participants who have taken part in other support groups.

⁵⁷ *Purify our hearts, O Lord, by the heavenly fire of the Holy Spirit, that we may serve you with a chaste body and please you*

with a pure heart. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. From the Roman Missal, third typical edition, Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, no. 39: For Chastity.

⁵⁸ See appendix on page 78, below, for a discussion on the role of the Twelve Steps in Courage meetings.

on temptations or failings, but also on the positive aspects of his or her life of prayer and whatever small victories may have been achieved in the spiritual battle for chastity and integration. At times the chaplain may wish to guide the discussion by proposing a question around which to frame the check-in. This can be particularly helpful in the context of a retreat or day of recollection, or when there is a large group of participants.

Each chapter member should be encouraged to speak personally and to use “I” statements, which should reflect his or her personal experience. The chaplain should strongly discourage discussions or venting about third parties who are not present—the member is expected to speak about him or herself.⁵⁹ Politics, obscure theological matters, and abstractions are to be avoided since such practice can distract the group member from facing real problems and feelings by hiding under an intellectual mask.

Members should be reminded of the obligation of every Christian to avoid the occasion of sin and to avoid giving scandal to others. When a member needs to speak honestly about some personal struggle, or even to recount a temptation or a fall, he or she should be careful not to provide details that would provoke unchaste thoughts in those who are listening, nor to mention specific places, websites or applications that he or she may have used or been tempted to use. He or she should practice the virtue of *modesty*, which “protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what

should remain hidden. It is ordered to chastity to whose sensitivity it bears witness.”⁶⁰

There should not be “cross-talk” during the check-in; each member should speak without being interrupted by other members. Once each attendee has had an opportunity to check in, the remainder of the meeting is used for **discussion**. The chaplain leads and facilitates this discussion, which can take for its starting point one of the topics mentioned above, some common experience or challenge that came up during the “checking in,” or some other topic related to the Five Goals.

The last few minutes of the meeting are dedicated to **prayer in common**. This is an especially appropriate time for intercessory prayer – petitions for sick or absent members; for family and friends of those in attendance; for the Courage and EnCourage apostolates and those who serve as chaplains and staff; for the happy repose of departed chaplains, members and family; for the Church universal, the diocese, the bishop; for those who are opposed to the work of the apostolate; and whatever other needs or burdens may be part of the life of the members. All may be invited to mention spontaneously their particular intentions. It is in this experience of shared prayer that the fellowship of the Third Goal is best expressed, and gifts of God’s grace and presence are assured, as He himself has testified: “Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For

⁵⁹ A saying sometimes attributed to Saint Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio) notes, “A person who confesses another

person’s sins should be prepared to do the other person’s penance.”

⁶⁰ *Catechism*, no. 2521.

where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:19-20).

Outside the Meetings

The fellowship that is created and nurtured at the Courage meeting ought to be fostered outside of the meetings as well. Many chapters plan social gatherings from time to time – a dinner together before or after a meeting, for example, or a celebration for a holiday or the birthday of a member. Prudence and charity both suggest that these social events be planned with the whole chapter in mind, and that the invitation should be public and open to all.

Annual or periodic retreats, days of recollection or other spiritual events can strengthen the bond of the chapter in their common striving for holiness. Such events also provide opportunities for several chapters within a region to collaborate and gather together, as well as a chance to invite chaplains from one local chapter to speak to members of another. Annual regional retreats are sponsored by the Courage Office throughout the year, but individual chapters are strongly encouraged to organize these programs as well. The Courage Office will gladly share the details of local events on its website. Local and regional retreats almost always include an opportunity for a member to give his or her personal testimony.

Chapters are encouraged to create and maintain lists of phone numbers and/or email addresses to facilitate communication among the members. In addition to sharing announcements like a change in meeting time or venue, or cancellation of a meeting

due to inclement weather, it is also a useful way to keep members informed of situations like the sickness or death of a member or a member's loved one. Some chapters find it useful for a trusted member to send out a text message or email reminder before each meeting, to allow each member to indicate whether or not he or she can attend. When such lists are prepared and maintained, respect for the confidentiality and (if desired) anonymity of the members must be assured. The list should be kept by the chaplain or a trusted member, and should not be used for personal or group emails on topics not related to the Five Goals. (Putting the list of addressees in the "bcc:" field rather than the "cc:" field helps to preserve the privacy of the members.)

Confidentiality

The ability of each member to speak honestly about his or her journey of conversion is assured by the mutual trust that what is said at the Courage meeting will be held in confidence by all who attend. Especially when a member needs to talk about personal struggles with temptation and sin, it is important that everyone knows that what is said at the meeting stays there. In general, no one should bring up what is shared in a Courage meeting in another context.

The Courage meeting is not conducted under the seal that pertains to the Sacrament of Confession, however, and there are important exceptions to this expectation of confidentiality of which both the chaplain and the members should be aware. For example, if a member discusses plans to attempt suicide or to harm another person, or discloses incidences of abuse or neglect of children or

other vulnerable persons, chaplains are generally mandated by civil law to report this to appropriate authorities. In particular, Courage chaplains and members must always follow all relevant civil and ecclesiastical laws regarding reporting of sexual abuse of minors and other vulnerable persons. In handling such mandated reporting, chaplains should maintain discretion and concern for the rights of all involved, and not discuss the situation beyond what is required. Conversations between members and the chaplain that do not fall under these particular exceptions of mandated reporting should be treated with the confidentiality always due to the (non-sacramental) internal forum. The chaplain should never give a member reason to fear speaking honestly about difficult or sensitive situations, which is the foundation not only of the Third Goal but of one's road to conversion and growth in holiness.

Sensitivity to the particular situation of each individual member also calls for respect and reserve when members meet each other or the chaplain in a setting outside the Courage meeting. As mentioned in the Introduction, some members are more private than others regarding their experience of same-sex attractions and their participation in Courage. Generally, when members encounter one another in public, a polite smile may be better than a greeting, particularly when one member is accompanied by family members or acquaintances who may ask how they know the other person. This is not a hard-and-fast rule – in large crowds or away from home, for example, anonymity may not be an issue – but members should

be reminded from time to time to respect each other's privacy even when away from the meeting.

Group Dynamics

The Courage chaplain facilitates the meeting, guides the discussion, and when necessary resolves conflicts among the members or gently ends discussion of a contentious topic. All of the same rules of charity, prudence and respect that a priest needs to apply and enforce in parish meetings and other group settings will be part of the Courage meeting as well. In particular, he would do well to keep in mind potential situations like the following:

- A person who would *monopolize the discussion* with his or her own viewpoint or issues. This type of person can intimidate others into keeping quiet or yielding their turn to participate. A gentle but firm reminder that everyone must be given a turn to talk is useful and sometimes necessary. Some chapters have found it helpful to set an objective time limit (3 to 5 minutes, for example) for each person's turn in the "checking in" portion of the meeting, as a non-confrontational way to avoid one person taking up all of the allotted time.
- A person who *generally remains silent* from week to week, even when invited to speak. Each person's comfort level should be respected, especially when one is at his or her first meeting. But when a person never participates, it makes it difficult for him or her to receive the benefits of fellowship, and sometimes creates mistrust among other

members, who wonder why a person comes to listen to them but doesn't share his or her own story. Gentle encouragement to participate may cause discomfort in the short term but will bear lasting fruit. The chaplain should find opportunities away from the chapter setting to encourage and invite shy persons to share with the chapter in a spirit of trust and openness.

- A *passive-aggressive person* who does not speak up during the meeting, but complains privately to others about the topic of discussion or about other members. When the chaplain becomes aware of this kind of behavior, he should encourage the member to voice his or her concerns openly to the chapter at the appropriate time. Otherwise, such an attitude can have a corrosive effect on the mutual trust and charity on which the fellowship of the chapter is based.
- The person *who has an answer or advice for everyone*. The chaplain does not know everything, but he is in charge of the meeting, and he may from time to time need to assert his role, with charity and firmness. Each member should be encouraged to offer helpful advice from his or her experience. But to let a member set himself or herself up as an expert on everyone's problems runs the risk of creating a chapter-within-a-chapter, and undermining the trust that the members have in the chaplain as their spiritual father and as a representative of the Church. It may also be the case that such a person advises or criticizes everyone else, to avoid having to share his or her own story and receive help from others. This kind of defensiveness becomes an obstacle to this member receiving the help he or she needs.
- The person *who shares too much*. We have already considered the necessity of modesty for preserving the chastity and innocence of others, by not revealing prurient details of temptations or falls, nor identifying places or tools for unchaste behavior. From another angle, some members, thinking they are being "transparent" or "honest," will want to share details of their last confession, or a session with a counselor, or a conversation with their spiritual director. Of course, the advice a counselor or confessor might give one person in certain circumstances would be inappropriate for another person in different circumstances. A gentle reminder of appropriate boundaries will help the person who would over-share to keep things in their proper context and avoid distressing or confusing others.
- The person *who shares too little*. At times a person may be resistant to discussing personal things, instead speaking in general terms about current events in society or the Church, issues at work or school, health issues or family disagreements, or other kinds of "small talk." Gentle, kind follow-up questions from the chaplain can help the person to focus on topics more related to the Goals, and to share more confidently. If the person is shy or reluctant by nature, it might be better for the chaplain to broach the subject privately before or after a meeting,

so that the person does not feel singled out or put “on the spot.”

Joining and Leaving the Chapter

As mentioned earlier in the Introduction,⁶¹ the chaplain is responsible for vetting potential members of the chapter to make sure that they are aware of and committed to the Five Goals, and that the chapter meeting will be helpful for them. Following his initial meeting or meetings with a new member, the chaplain ought to arrange to introduce the new member to the chapter. A new member’s first meeting can be a time of great emotion. If the chaplain arranges to meet the person before the meeting time, walk him or her to the meeting room, and make introductions personally, it is a great help to creating a good first experience.

Because the number of attendees at a typical Courage meeting tends to be small, the particular personalities of those who are present on a given day can have a big impact on a newcomer’s impression of the chapter. It is useful to ask a new member to commit to attending several meetings (perhaps three to five) before deciding that the chapter is not for him or her. When a member only attends one meeting and does not return, a gentle call from the chaplain offering to talk about his experience and concerns can be helpful.

When the chaplain and the potential member come to the conclusion that he or she is not ready for the chapter meeting, the chaplain should offer to see the person

privately as their schedules allow. It may be useful for the chaplain to identify other priests to whom he can refer a potential member for spiritual direction and support.

When considering the group dynamics and difficult personalities discussed above, it is generally better to err on the side of being too gentle than too firm, so as not to risk alienating members. “This is particularly important because more than a few persons with a homosexual inclination feel themselves to be unwelcome and rejected” in the parish and other settings.⁶² However, when a person is continually unkind, combative or disruptive, the chaplain may have no choice but to insist that he or she no longer attend the meetings.

Such conversations should always occur in private, to avoid embarrassing the member in question or creating a confrontational situation in the meeting. When possible, the chaplain should offer to continue to see the person privately, so that he or she is not without the Church’s support. The chaplain may be able to help the person to return to the chapter at a later date. However, when a person must be asked to leave the chapter because he or she has propositioned another member, created a harassing environment, or otherwise violated appropriate boundaries and behavior, that person is generally not to be invited to return without having made a sincere effort to demonstrate repentance and to repair the damage that was done to individuals and to the chapter.

⁶¹ See p. 9, above.

⁶² USCCB, *Ministry*, p. 17.

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“To be mindful of the truth that chaste friendships are not only possible but necessary in a chaste Christian life and in doing so, to provide encouragement to one another in forming and sustaining them.”

Support

The Art of Accompaniment

In many ways, participation in a Courage chapter is a kind of apprenticeship in chaste friendships. Because Courage members will be coming from a world that seems not to understand the value of friendship, and oversexualizes feelings and relationships, growth in friendship will likely be a process that takes time and requires attention from several angles at once.

The fundamental friendship that a Courage member will develop is with the chaplain. In most cases, the chaplain is the first person potential members meet, when they have a face-to-face meeting to determine if they are ready to join the group. It is the chaplain who introduces the new member to the rest of the chapter. It has already been mentioned that the chaplain acts as a spiritual father to the members of the chapter. But he also walks the path of holiness alongside each member as a fellow disciple in a process known as *accompaniment*.

Pope Francis developed this notion of accompaniment in the first interview he gave after his inauguration as pope, in September 2013. Speaking about his experience caring for a man who experienced same-sex attractions and wanted to know whether God and the Church accepted or rejected him, the Holy Father noted that,

We must always consider the person. Here we enter into the mystery of the human being. In life, God accompanies persons, and we must accompany them, starting from their situation. It is necessary to accompany them with mercy. When that happens, the Holy Spirit inspires the priest to say the right thing.⁶³

The accompaniment that the chaplain provides to the potential member during the vetting process begins, then, with a simple but important request: “Tell me your story.” When the chaplain is able to listen carefully and respectfully to a person’s experiences and desires, and to take them seriously, the

⁶³ Pope Francis, quoted in Antonio Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *America* 209:8 (30 Sep 2013).

process of understanding and coping with them has already begun.

Several things happen when the chaplain approaches the member with respect for his or her story. First, the individual who has been isolated by his confusion and suffering hears an invitation for reunion: the chaplain is genuinely interested in what he feels, what he wants, where he's been, and where he's going. It will take time for trust to grow, though some people have been waiting for so long to tell somebody who might understand that they jump at the chance.

The chaplain who is a careful listener, and has taken the time in prayer and study to imagine where a person experiencing same-sex attractions might be coming from, will be able to reflect back to the person the important parts of the story—to help the person listen to himself, and see his own story through a different lens. Sympathizing with situations that must have been painful sets a person free to acknowledge the pain; rejoicing in moments of strength helps a person to grow in confidence and in awareness of grace. Above all, the chaplain can help the person to reflect on where God was amid the panoply of life experiences, good and bad, and teach him how to pray with memories of those situations and seek healing.

Having heard, respected and responded to a person's relation of his own story, the chaplain can then help the member to evaluate it. Gentle but firm follow-up questions: "So, what are you looking for? Are you finding it? Are you happy? What's making you happy? Is there something that would make you happier?" can bring a person to an

honest evaluation, from within, of his current situation. If he is headed in the wrong direction, but he is able to discover that fact in his own time and his own process, he is more likely to want to know where the right road is, rather than defensively, stubbornly persisting on the wrong one. The chaplain then becomes a companion on the journey: having sympathized with pain, and mourned together for lost time and lost opportunity, they can now seek out the right road and walk it together.

Perhaps this method of pastoral care seems daunting. The experience of the other is foreign to one's own, and it is easier to fear the troublesome parts than to feel confident of finding a point of understanding. It is obvious that such an approach does not bear fruit overnight, and busy chaplains may wonder if they have the ministerial "bandwidth" to be able to accompany a person, or many people, for the long term. One's own woundedness can provoke fear or discomfort at the thought of listening for long to the hurts and doubts of someone else. But the answer to all of these concerns is confidence that the One who told his disciples, "I call you friends" (John 15:15), also meant what he said when he told the first priests, "I know whom I have chosen" (Jn 13:18), and that they would "do the works that I do, and greater works than these" (John 14:12).

Developing Chaste Friendships

"The virtue of chastity blossoms in *friendship*," the *Catechism* says, which "shows the disciple how to follow and imitate him who has chosen us as his friends, who has given himself totally to us and allows us to

participate in his divine estate.”⁶⁴ The relationship between Christ and the individual Christian is not like a wheel, where each spoke is connected to the hub but separate from the other spokes. Rather, Christ calls his friends to form one Body with him *and with each other*, so that the clearest sign of one’s love for God is the measure in which he loves his neighbor (cf. 1 John 4:20-21).

In a similar way, the friendship that the chaplain develops with each member ought to be an impetus and encouragement for the members to form strong friendships among themselves. Such friendships will be fostered by things that have already been mentioned in the discussion of the Third Goal:

- the honest sharing of thoughts and experiences which leads to deep knowledge of and concern for one another;
- a genuine interest in the needs and experience of other members: their joys and sorrows, their successes and their struggles;
- social interaction before, after and outside of meetings, where the invitation is heartfelt and addressed to all inclusively;
- shared intercessory prayer for the needs of each member and of their loved ones.

It would be helpful for the chaplain to discuss the nature of true friendship with the chapter frequently. Resources for such a discussion could include the classic works on friendship like Aristotle’s *Nichomachean*

Ethics (Books 8 and 9); Cicero’s *De Amicitia*; Saint Francis de Sales’s conference “On Cordiality” and Part 3 of his *Introduction to the Devout Life* (particularly important to Father Harvey); and Saint Aelred of Rievaulx’s *Spiritual Friendship*, as well as stories of saints and holy people who lived community life and friendship in powerful ways. It is also useful to consider the distinction between friendship and *eros* made by C.S. Lewis in his book *The Four Loves* (already mentioned under the First Goal). Lewis begins by describing the main interest of lovers and friends:

[T]hough we can have erotic love and friendship for the same person yet in some ways nothing is less like a Friendship than a love-affair. Lovers are always talking to one another about their love; Friends hardly ever about their Friendship. Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest.⁶⁵

The “common interest” that Lewis mentions can be mundane or sublime—as simple as a shared ethnicity or affinity for music, sports, or film; or as sublime as a shared love for God, or a shared pursuit of holiness. Here is the key to the friendships which can develop between Courage members: they have made a choice—often radical and heroic, and always counter-cultural—to choose Christ over the world, and to conform their lives to the Gospel call to chastity and integrity when the world around them is mostly choosing pleasure and an easy life.

⁶⁴ *Catechism*, no. 2347.

⁶⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harvest, repr. 1991), 61.

The chaplain should frequently remind the members that their shared commitment to living out the Five Goals has the power to unite them to one another in friendship as much as to unite them to Christ and the Church.

Desires and affections are always in need of prudence, conversion and purification, of course, and friendship is no exception. Having found a good friend, who really sees things from the same angle and can be a true companion on the journey, the temptation will often be to pursue an exclusive connection with that one friend. This may be especially true for people who have experienced hurt or betrayal in past relationships: having found a good friend, it is tempting to rest in one exclusive friendship with someone who seems trustworthy rather than risk being hurt by multiple people. Again, C.S. Lewis provides an important insight that the chaplain should keep in mind and share with the chapter:

Above all, Eros (while it lasts) is necessarily between two only. But two, far from being the necessary number for Friendship, is not even the best. And the reason for this is important. ...

In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. ... Hence true Friendship is the least jealous of loves. Two friends delight to be joined by a third, and three by a fourth, if only the newcomer is qualified to become a real friend. They can then say,

as the blessed souls say in Dante, "Here comes one who will augment our loves." For in this love "to divide is not to take away."⁶⁶

The Importance of Community

As the members of the local chapter grow in their ability to trust one another, and to share their lives with accountability and honesty, bonds of friendship will grow as well. Ideally, the friendships that the members will form in the chapter will strengthen their confidence to form and foster healthy, chaste friendships with others outside the chapter, both of the same and the opposite sex.

The insight of the founding Courage members that "chaste friendships are not only possible but necessary in a chaste Christian life" is affirmed by the Church. As the Bishops of the United States have noted:

One way in which the Church can aid persons with a homosexual inclination is by nurturing the bonds of friendship among people. In their analysis of human nature, the ancient philosophers recognized that friendship is absolutely essential for the good life, for true happiness. Friendships of various kinds are necessary for a full human life, and they are likewise necessary for those attempting to live chastely in the world. There can be little hope of living a healthy, chaste life without nurturing human bonds. Living in isolation can ultimately exacerbate one's disordered tendencies and undermine the practice of chastity. ...

⁶⁶ Ibid.

True friendships are not opposed to chastity; nor does chastity inhibit friendship. In fact, the virtues of friendship and of chastity are ordered to each other. ...

While the bonds of friendship should be carefully fostered at all levels, loving friendships among the members of a family are particularly important. Those ministering in the name of the Church should encourage healthy relationships between persons with a homosexual inclination and the other members of their families. The family can provide invaluable support to people who are striving to grow in the virtue of chastity.

The local Church community is also 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.⁶⁷

Courage members should be encouraged to participate fully in the lives of their parishes,⁶⁸ and of the organizations that are found there. If there are opportunities to be of service or participate in the social or liturgical life of the parish where the chaplain is assigned, this is also to be commended.

Some Courage members seek a more intentional community, and may ask the chaplain about the possibility of living

together with another Courage member for the sake of support and accountability. This is not recommended, especially when one or both feel an attraction to the other. An exception for a particular case would require a good deal of personal maturity, reflection and guidance. While it is possible for people to live under the same roof without being sexually intimate, two things must always be avoided: putting oneself in a situation to be tempted by sexual desires (that is, in the “near occasion of sin”). and giving scandal to others.

These both require, at a minimum, that people who would share a house or apartment have separate bedrooms. If it were possible for them to include a third or fourth housemate as well, it would be even clearer that their intentions are to live as friends and not as lovers. Incidentally, this gives the chaplain a way to gently inquire about people’s intentions: asking what kind of living space they are considering, or whether they would still want to live together if it meant that they had to include a third housemate, may reveal what kind of relationship they really desire. In addition, the chaplain should pay particular attention to the different ways that men and women experience attractions and friendship, and experience relationships.

⁶⁷ USCCB, *Ministry*, pp.10-12. For context, see the full document, which is included in the appendix of this *Handbook* beginning on page 111.

⁶⁸ In this context, note well the instruction of USCCB, *Ministry*, p. 17: “Persons who experience same-sex attraction

and yet are living in accord with Church teaching should be encouraged to take an active role in the life of the faith community. However, the Church has a right to deny roles of service to those whose behavior violates her teaching. Such service may seem to condone an immoral lifestyle and may even be an occasion of scandal.”

5

“To live lives that may serve as good examples to others.”

Good Example

Father Harvey was fond of saying of the apostolate that “our best ambassadors are our members.” Chaplains will sometimes be called upon to explain the teachings of the Church and the approach of the apostolate in various settings: parish talks, conferences and interviews. But the most eloquent presentation of these truths seldom has the same impact as someone who can speak from his or her own experience about the difference that embracing the Gospel call to chastity has made in his or her life.

The Fifth Goal encourages Courage chaplains and members alike to give testimony to the beauty of God’s call to chastity, and to share the invitation with others.

Publicizing the Local Chapter

Courage and EnCourage have sometimes been called “the best kept secret in the Church.” Out of deep respect for the privacy of each member, the tradition of Courage has always been to invite potential members personally, rather than publicize the details of meetings and invite people to “drop in.” But Courage is not an “underground” apostolate and does not operate in secrecy. There

are several methods that chaplains can use to make the local church aware of the presence of the apostolate.

When the diocese has a *print or online newspaper or magazine*, or a diocesan *radio or television station*, it is worthwhile for the chaplain to contact the editors to suggest an article or interview about the local chapter. While the chaplain himself can be the subject of the interview, most editors will be willing to allow Courage members to be interviewed using a pseudonym to protect their privacy, if desired. The Courage Office can provide background material (statistics, documentation, etc.) for reporters, and the Executive Director is usually available to be interviewed as well. Chaplains should contact the Director of Communications in the Courage Office before speaking with editors or reporters, and encourage members to do the same. The Director can provide support and advice in arranging and carrying out these press events, as well as wider publicity for the article when it appears.

Similarly, some diocesan news outlets will welcome guest columns from priests

and others in ministry, and the chaplain could take advantage of such an opportunity to write about the apostolate. Such articles should be coordinated with the Director of Communications.

Most dioceses will have annual or periodic events—for example, a “Catechetical Forum,” a “Parish Life Congress” or “Spirituality Days”—at which there is a space set aside for *exhibitors from Catholic ministries and businesses*. When the local chapter is able to participate as an exhibitor at such events it can go a long way towards making people in ministry aware of the apostolate. Typically the table would be staffed by the chaplain, and a few members of the apostolate who would be comfortable identifying themselves as Courage members. Set-up for such an exhibit can be very simple: brochures⁶⁹ and/or business cards giving the contact details for the local chapter; copies of press coverage of the local chapter; perhaps a video screen sharing videos produced by Courage International, etc. If the chapter anticipates being able to participate in such events regularly, it may be worth the investment to print a tablecloth with the Courage logo and the contact details of the local chapter.⁷⁰ The Courage Office can provide books and videos on consignment to local chapters who wish to sell such resources. The local chapter covers the shipping cost and should be aware of local laws and diocesan policies regarding sales at such events.

Chapters may maintain *websites*, whether as a stand-alone project of the chapter (which is responsible for hosting costs) or as a page on the diocesan website. They may also maintain *social media accounts* in the name of the local chapter, to share contact information and links to useful resources.

Mandatory guidelines for local websites and social media accounts, and for use of the Courage logo online or on printed materials such as brochures, business cards, banners or tablecloths, are included in the appendix to this Handbook, beginning on page 73.

Personal Testimonies

From time to time, Courage members may be invited to share personal stories of their experience of same-sex attractions, the way that they came to know about Courage, and the difference that their embrace of chastity and their pursuit of the Five Goals have made in their lives. The Courage Office has developed guidelines over many years to assist Courage members in composing these testimonies. These are available in the Appendix on page 76.

A person who is invited to give a personal testimony should clearly be well-known to the chaplain who is recommending him or her. Of course, personal testimonies are more often than not stories of conversion from serious sins, and no one giving a testimony will have a perfectly sinless past. The power of the testimony often comes from the

⁶⁹ Several brochure templates are available on the Courage website that can be customized with local contact information and printed by the local chapter.

⁷⁰ One chapter has had success with printing a tablecloth that included a one-foot-square “QR code,” which could

be photographed with a mobile phone up to 10 feet away, and takes a person to the chapter’s website. Potential members who were reluctant to come to the table could thus obtain information while maintaining their privacy.

greatness of God's mercy and grace in the midst of serious sin—one thinks naturally of Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, and other famous converts to the Faith.

The chaplain should have a frank conversation with a member who wants to give a testimony, urging him or her to consider the sins of his or her past, especially those that have not yet come to light, and acknowledging that by speaking publicly about his or her story, the member may be inviting criticism from others and even revelation of past sins. The member should consider carefully whether he or she is ready to take responsibility in such a situation, both for his or her own failings, and for the hurt or harm that such revelations may do to his or her reputation, to his family and friends, and to the Courage or EnCourage apostolate. In case of past criminal behavior, taking responsibility may involve accepting civil or criminal penalties or other personal and public consequences. In all cases, the member should be ready to speak about his or her repentance and how he or she has made restitution and atonement for these sins.

Choosing a Vocation

Part of the pastoral care that the chaplain provides for members striving to live the Fifth Goal is to help them discern the *vocation* to which God is calling them. Much more than a choice of career or work, a vocation is an invitation to follow Christ more closely by conforming one's life to the example of Christ in a particular way. "The Church knows that her message is in

harmony with the most secret desires of the human heart when she champions the dignity of the human vocation, restoring hope to those who have already despaired of anything higher than their present lot," as the bishops gathered at the Second Vatican Council wrote in 1965. "Far from diminishing man, her message brings to his development light, life and freedom. Apart from this message nothing will avail to fill up the heart of man."⁷¹

The choice of a vocation, and a "state in life" in which that vocation is to be lived out, is ultimately a choice of to whom one is going to make a gift of himself or herself. The bishops at Vatican II go on to explain that this complete self-gift is at the heart of every vocation:

The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of Man take on light. ... [Christ] fully reveals Man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear.

The Lord Jesus ... implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.⁷²

Some Courage members have already entered into the *Sacrament of Marriage* before joining the apostolate, while others experience some attraction to the opposite sex and are contemplating whether marriage may be their vocation. The experience of

⁷¹ *Gaudium et spes*, 21.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 22 and 24.

same-sex attractions is not in itself a canonical impediment to marriage, and the Church does not consider a person to be defined by these attractions. But it would be foolish to advise someone to keep the reality of these attractions from his or her spouse or potential spouse. The chaplain should have serious conversations with members who are married or are contemplating marriage, explaining the necessity of honesty, accountability and fidelity in the total union of lives that marriage ought to be. It would be wise for the chaplain to consult with experts in marriage and family counseling for advice in how such honest conversations ought to happen between spouses or potential spouses, and to assist the member to have such conversations.

While some Courage members live happily in marriage with a person of the opposite sex, no person is obliged to be married in order to live a holy life. As the bishops of England and Wales wrote:

The Church teaches that sexual intercourse finds its proper place and meaning only in marriage and does not share the assumption common in some circles that every adult person needs to be sexually active.

This teaching applies to all, whether married or unmarried, homosexual or heterosexual, engaged, single through choice, widowed or divorced. Everyone needs to develop the virtue of chastity so as to live well in his or her own situation.

Moreover, there is more to a person than sexual inclination and more to love than sexual desire.⁷³

Many Courage members will remain unmarried, and the chaplain should help them to understand and accept the vocation to *the chaste single life* as something possible, life-giving and rewarding. Single people are called as much as married people to make a sincere gift of themselves, and this often comes from a commitment to service in one's family, one's parish, or another type of ministry or intentional community. Ideally, Courage members will be able to see their commitment to service as a form of spiritual motherhood or spiritual fatherhood, a real loving gift of self and not a consolation prize. In fact, the availability which characterizes single people, who are free to give of their time, energy and resources in ways that married people often are not, makes their gift of self even more necessary to the life of the Church and society.

Courage members who are considering vocations to *the priesthood or the consecrated life* should receive honest advice from the chaplain about the expectations the Church has for candidates to those vocations. Regarding the priesthood, the Church has made its position clear in the 2005 *Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies*, which was incorporated into the 2016 Fundamental Plan for Priestly Formation, issued under the title

⁷³ Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, *Cherishing Life* (2004), p. 113.

*The Gift of the Priestly Vocation.*⁷⁴ Both documents make clear that

the Church, while profoundly respecting the persons in question, cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called “gay culture.”⁷⁵

At the same time, the documents make a distinction between same-sex attractions which are “deep-seated” and attractions which seem to be connected to other issues of a more or less transitory nature; for example, emotional immaturity or a poor understanding of sexuality and love. In the latter case, there may be room for discernment as to whether the underlying situations can be resolved to such a degree that he is able to live a chaste, fully-integrated and affectively mature life as a priest. The chaplain should have frank conversations with the member who is thinking about a priestly vocation, both to explain the Church’s guidelines and to understand what they mean for the person’s own situation.

The Church has not provided explicit advice for discerning vocations to the consecrated life, but it seems fair to apply the same criteria as noted above. Discernment is especially important given that the charism of the consecrated life is that it is almost always

lived in community. Chastity means not just avoiding unchaste behaviors, as has already been noted, but integrating sexuality into the wholeness of the person, which includes his or her understanding of relationships with people of both sexes. To enter into a religious community without having achieved this integration would inevitably lead to an unhappy life, if not more serious problems in regard to sexuality.

In any case, “it would be gravely dishonest for a candidate” for the priesthood or the consecrated life “to hide his own homosexuality in order to proceed, despite everything, towards ordination” or religious profession. “Such a deceitful attitude does not correspond to the spirit of truth, loyalty and openness that must characterize the personality of him who believes he is called to serve Christ and his Church” in these vocations.⁷⁶ A Courage chaplain, serving as a spiritual father to the members, has the same responsibility as his or her spiritual director; namely, “he represents the Church in the internal forum. ... If a candidate practices homosexuality or presents deep-seated homosexual tendencies, his spiritual director as well as his confessor have the duty to dissuade him in conscience from proceeding towards ordination.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Cf. paragraph 189 and paragraphs 199-201.

⁷⁵ *Instruction*, no. 1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Part Two

The Goals of EnCourage



Saint Augustine and His Mother Saint Monica
(the patron saints of EnCourage) by Ary Scheffer, 1845.

1

“To grow spiritually through service to others, spiritual reading, prayer, meditation, individual spiritual direction, frequent attendance at Mass, and the frequent reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist.”

Prayer and Dedication

Trustful Surrender to the Will of God

The First Goal of EnCourage is the same as the Second Goal of Courage: to develop a life of prayer and dedication that supports and strengthens one’s resolve to live according to God’s Will. Everything that has been said above about the individual parts of this Goal regarding Courage can be equally said of EnCourage members. This section will highlight a few aspects of Prayer and Dedication that are specific to parents and other family members whose loved one experiences same-sex attractions.

The first reaction of parents to a son or daughter’s “coming out”—that is, sharing the fact that he or she experiences same-sex attractions—is often panic. All in an instant, they realize that their plans for their children may not be realized, and that the assumptions that they had been making about their family life and the inner life of their son or daughter were incorrect. At the heart of every parent is a desire for their children to be safe and happy, and perceiving a threat to

this safety and happiness, they feel powerless.

Their next reaction is often what might be called the “emergency room mentality” — “My child is in danger, is sick, is hurting ... where do I go to fix this?” Often this initial reaction has the power to alienate the LGBTQ-identifying child, who is “claiming his truth,” from the parents whose concerns are interpreted as a rejection of the “real me.”

There is really only one remedy for the emotional pain of the parents: to lead them to entrust the situation, which they cannot control, fix or make go away, into the hands and providence of almighty God. This may seem like small comfort to parents who are turning to the chaplain for answers. But experience shows that unless a deep relationship with God is in place, no amount of intellectual or relational effort will suffice.

Chaplains need to start with the parents’ own situation, assessing where their relationship with God and life of prayer has been thus far, and helping them to develop

habits of prayer and devotion appropriate to the individual and the family. Particularly useful is teaching the parents to make a daily *examen* – a meditation on the course of the day that seeks to identify the presence and action of God, even amidst family stress and difficulties. Persevering efforts to recognize God in one’s daily life help the person to grow in the ability to trust and hope in divine providence.

Keeping the Spiritual in Perspective

One way in which the chaplain can assist EnCourage members in their spiritual life is by helping them to understand and to discern well the spiritual realities that are at play in the lives of their family members, and to understand the spiritual combat in which every Christian must engage in the way that the Church does. Certainly there are aspects in which disordered sexual desires and temptations are the work of Satan and the demons, who are always looking for ways to tempt people away from God and from the life of grace of which they are deprived.

But a healthy understanding of the work of the Evil One includes the reality that not all struggles or sufferings are demonic in their origin, and that it is not as simple as having the “right prayer” or the “right devotion” to solve what is really a very complex situation in the life of their loved one. In particular, the Church has established important rules around the use of prayers of exorcism and deliverance, and restricts some prayers that address demons directly to the use of priests under particular conditions. EnCourage members should be guided to recognize when a particular prayer or devotion is

being promoted sensationally or superstitiously, and to remember the power of their prayers of intercession for their loved ones, without having to seek out the dramatic or unusual.

Shared Prayer

Like Courage meetings, each EnCourage meeting should conclude with intercessory prayer, in which each participant is invited to share out loud the intentions for which they wish to pray. This can be a powerful reminder that no member walks this path alone, and that Christ has promised to hear and answer the prayers that his disciples share with one another (cf. Mt. 18:19).

In 2016, members of the online EnCourage message board began praying together on evening telephone conference calls, as an extension of this shared intercession. At the present time, these nightly conference calls, organized by an EnCourage mother, are held every day of the year, with days of the week assigned to different devotional prayers. The efforts of this group of “prayer partners” – which has become known as “Praying With Courage” – also include regular days of fasting, special times of prayer for particular intentions (for example, a novena for loved ones in June, which is observed in secular society as “Pride Month”) and even “virtual pilgrimages” in which members choose a day to pray for one another at shrines near their homes. Such efforts are to be commended, and similar arrangements can be made for shared prayer by local EnCourage chapters.

To join “Praying With Courage”, one should email praywithcourage@gmail.com.

2

“To gain a deeper understanding of the needs, difficulties and challenges experienced by men and women who experience same-sex attractions.”

Formation

Initial Reactions

When a family member “comes out,” the first reaction of loved ones, as has already been noted, involves a wide range of emotions. Parents in particular deal with disappointment, a need to fix the situation, confusion about the future, and many other questions. Before they find their way to *Encourage*, many potential members have spent a lot of time “researching” the question, online or in books, trying to understand not only what it means for their loved ones, but where the situation of same-sex attractions comes from, whether it can be “fixed,” and, often, who is to blame.

This desire to identify the “source” or “cause” of homosexuality is understandable—when one feels powerless over a situation, knowledge feels like power and control. Sadly, this desire on the part of parents and other family members usually only serves to drive a deeper wedge between them and their son or daughter. A question like, “How did this happen?” comes across to the person living with same-sex attractions as a rejection: “They think there’s something wrong with me. They don’t see

me and my real life, but a problem, or a ‘phase.’ They won’t understand me and can’t really love me because they don’t see me as a person. I can’t be accepted and safe until this ‘situation’ goes away.”

The result of online research often leads parents to conflicting theories, and the parents feel both confused and compelled to make a choice. On the one hand, some in society (and even in the Church) make it out to be a simple biological fact: People are “born that way,” either by God’s design or because of simple biology, a “gay gene” or some other inborn factor. On the other, some sources insist that the experience of same-sex attractions is the result of a moral failing or a deliberate choice, and suggest that with enough effort a person can “grow out of it” and “become straight.” In addition, some sources place the origins of same-sex attractions in various explanations of family dynamics and child psychology: typically, an overbearing mother, or a physically or emotionally absent father, or a lack of interest or skill in sports or “gendered” activities, or poor self-esteem, they suggest, may be the reason. While some people who experience

same-sex attractions may find that certain psychological theories resonate with their particular situation, there is no “one size fits all” explanation for the origins of this experience. (See further discussion below.)

The EnCourage chaplain needs to acknowledge this desire for information and explanations, while gently but firmly explaining to EnCourage members that the truth is never so simple as an “either-or” choice between “nature and nurture.” Moreover, a quest for an external explanation for such a deeply personal experience as sexual attraction turns the loved one into a problem to be solved rather than a living, breathing, loving human being. As mentioned above in the discussion about accompaniment,⁷⁸ the words of Pope Francis are an important guide to understanding a loved one: “We must always consider the person. Here we enter into the mystery of the human being. In life, God accompanies persons, and we must accompany them, starting from their situation.”

The setting of the EnCourage meeting is valuable for members because it gives them an opportunity to express their concerns, and their desire for answers, in a safe environment. They can share their pain and confusion honestly, knowing that other members of the chapter understand where they are coming from and do not judge them for wanting answers. But the chaplain should not leave the discussion there; rather, both he and the more experienced members can acknowledge their pain while encouraging them to leave such questions to God’s

wisdom, and focus on understanding their loved ones “starting from their situation.” All that has been noted above about the chaplain’s accompaniment of the Courage member can be shared with EnCourage members to guide them in discussions with their loved ones.

Chaplains should be particularly attentive to the concerns and questions of EnCourage members whose loved ones are children or teenagers. The experience of these loved ones will be rather different from those of adults, because of both the natural fluidity of sexuality and self-understanding in adolescence, and the way in which different generations think and are educated about sexuality and identity.

“Born that way?”

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes that the experience of same-sex attractions, while not a sin in itself, is nonetheless “objectively disordered”—that is, these attractions lead a person to desire same-sex intimacy, which is always wrong.⁷⁹ So it is not possible to say that God, in creating a person, causes or desires that person to be attracted to people of the same-sex.

This would imply either that God has created such a person with a different kind of human nature, for which complementarity and procreativity not necessary for the ordering of sexuality; or else that God creates some people with unfulfillable desires, and a profound and more or less permanent inclination to things that are always wrong. The former is excluded by the fact that all

⁷⁸ See page 41, above.

⁷⁹ See discussion on page 22, above.

human beings share one human nature; the latter, by the fact that “God ... tempts no one” (James 1:13) and cannot be the source or cause of anything disordered.

So what does the Church say about the “source” of same-sex attractions? Simply that their origin in the mind and heart of a person “remains largely unexplained.”⁸⁰ Neither the Church nor Courage International insist that one biological or psychological theory explains the experience of same-sex attractions in any individual, much less in every person who has this experience.

Such an admission that the experience of same-sex attractions is complex and difficult to explain with simple theories is also made by the psychological and scientific community. For example, on its website, the American Psychological Association explains that

There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.⁸¹

A 2019 study by scientists examining genetic correlations in people who experience same-sex attractions made a similar comment:

In aggregate, all tested genetic variants accounted for 8% to 25% of variation in male and female same-sex sexual behavior ... and do not allow meaningful prediction of an individual’s sexual behavior. ...

Many uncertainties remain to be explored, including how sociocultural influences on sexual preference might interact with genetic preferences. ...

Overall, our findings ... underscore the complexity of sexuality.⁸²

Ultimately, the question of where same-sex attractions “come from” is not as important as how a person intends to live in response to God’s call to chastity and holiness. Chaplains can help EnCourage members to look not to the past but to the future, and to grow in their understanding of how to help their loved ones hear and embrace the Word of God in their daily lives.

“Needs, Difficulties and Challenges”

The *Catechism* also points out that when people experience same-sex attractions, this “constitutes for most of them a trial,” and so “they must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.”⁸³ This acceptance of a loved one who is almost certainly experiencing pain can be difficult for some EnCourage members. Sometimes they are too focused on the pain that the situation is

⁸⁰ *Catechism*, no. 2357.

⁸¹ American Psychological Association, “Answers to Your Questions: For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality” [www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation; accessed 1 January 2020].

⁸² Andrea Ganna et al., “Large-scale GWAS reveals insights into the genetic architecture of same-sex sexual behavior” (abstract). *Science* 365:6456 (2019) 76-93.

⁸³ *Catechism*, no. 2358.

causing them to be able to recognize it in their loved ones. At other times, they may be concerned that “accepting” the situation and looking out for the needs of their loved one could be misconstrued as condoning or approving their loved ones’ decisions regarding intimate relationships.

The EnCourage chaplain can invite parents to show “respect, compassion, and sensitivity” while providing an example to them. It is nearly impossible for EnCourage members to find peace of mind and heart, let alone rebuild strong relationships with their loved ones, until they can come to this point. As one long-time EnCourage member put it:

I came to a realization, some years after he came out to us, that all my tears were mainly for me. That I hadn’t understood the pain and the sorrow and the shame that [he] had experienced in his life. ...

And I remember, it hit me like a thunderbolt. I said, “Gee, what about his suffering? What is he going through? I know what I’m going through. He’s killing me. But what does he go through?”

And when I came to that understanding, that he had all of these experiences, which were devastating to him as a sensitive, caring, artistic young man that he is. And I had neglected that grief that was in him. That shame that was in him. That hostility too, that was in him. I was too focused on myself and my grief and my disappointment.⁸⁴

This EnCourage member’s insight is an important message for the chaplain to

convey to every member, encouraging them to focus on the needs of their loved ones rather than their own internal confusion and pain.

It is common for EnCourage members to invest a good deal of emotional energy, and even activism, in blaming their loved ones’ partner, or their Catholic school, or the example of celebrities, or this or that group, or book, or film, or television show, or any number of external villains as the reason their loved one now experiences same-sex attractions. Such reactions, while understandable, are very harmful. They distract the EnCourage member from the important work of entrusting their lives and their loved ones to God’s providence, and only serve to foster anger, hostility and division. This is always the work of the Evil One:

Our enemy the devil, who fights with us in order to vanquish us, seeks to disunite us in our houses, and to breed quarrels, dislikes, contests and rivalries, because while we are fighting with each other, he comes and conquers us, and makes us more securely his own.⁸⁵

When the EnCourage chaplain can help members to work through their pain and confusion, and turn their gaze to the needs of their loved ones, they can pursue the next Goal: forming and sustaining healthy relationships with them.

⁸⁴ Bob C., in Episode 4 of the video series *Invited to Courageous Love*, produced by Courage International, 2016.

⁸⁵ *If God Be With Us: Maxims of St Philip Neri arranged for every day of the year*, edited by F.W. Faber (Leominster: Gracewing, 1994), 73.

3

“To establish and maintain a healthy and wholesome relationship with their loved ones who experience same-sex attractions.”

Charity

Ultimately, every EnCourage member comes seeking the same thing: a way to keep the Faith while keeping their family bonds intact, healthy and strong. But modern society, and often even the loved one who identifies as LGBTQ, suggest that such a goal is unattainable—that there is only a choice between total acceptance of all of the loved one’s relationships and decisions, or total rejection of the loved one in favor of outdated rules of religion. The EnCourage apostolate exists because its chaplains and members believe that there is another way: that it is possible to say, “I love you very much, and nothing will change that. And it’s because I love you that I can’t support the decision you’re making about this relationship or this way of describing or presenting yourself.” A son or daughter identifying as LGBTQ does not have to change everything about himself or herself in order to be worthy of a parent’s love, respect and compassion. Neither should a parent have to change what he or she believes in order to be seen as truly loving a son or daughter. The aim of every EnCourage member is to arrive at a mutual respect and understanding, and to be able to

carry on as family even amid this serious disagreement.

Healthy relationships require healthy boundaries, honest dialogue, and a commitment to forgive and ask for forgiveness. It is good for EnCourage chaplains to remind members that the experience of same-sex attractions does not put their loved ones in a special category that makes it impossible to relate to them, or makes disagreements or hurtful conversations impossible to overcome. All of the skills that members have acquired in many years of family life, and in disagreements with other members of the family, will come to bear in their relationship with the loved one who identifies as LGBTQ. They remain the same person they were the day before “coming out” to their parents, and the best way to maintain a good relationship is to continue to treat them with the same respect and love.

“What Do I Say to Them?”

EnCourage parents do have special concerns in their relationships with loved ones who identify as LGBTQ, of course, and the

EnCourage chaplain should be ready to listen to these concerns and address them with sound advice. Perhaps the first concern of Catholic parents is how to relate to their sons and daughters in such a way that they convey concern without seeming to condone immoral behavior. Parents are “the first teachers of their children in the ways of Faith,” as the *Rite of Baptism* reminds them, and this responsibility does not end when the son or daughter reaches adulthood.

Chaplains should help EnCourage members to see that “keeping the faith” does not mean talking about sexual morality at every single opportunity. Sometimes parents experience the situation of their sons and daughters as a rejection of their work to catechize and rear their children in the faith. They look for the right angle, the right pamphlet or website or Scripture verse that is going to convince their child to turn back to the faith. They need reassurance that their efforts at catechesis were not in vain, and that God is always at work in the hearts and minds of their children. They need to know that they are not betraying the faith if they are not talking about sexual morality all the time. In fact, sometimes they will not need to share much at all about sexual morality, as the son or daughter is well aware of the parents’ position.

Relating to the Loved One’s Partner

Another common concern is how to relate to their loved one’s romantic partner. This can be a source of great anxiety for parents, especially at first. It is not uncommon to hear EnCourage parents admit that they

keep conversations with their children on a superficial level and avoid asking about whether they are romantically involved, because they are afraid to hear the answer. Some parents even forbid their children from mentioning the partner, even after they have been together for some time. Obviously this can create great strain in the relationship with the son or daughter, who not uncommonly responds with an ultimatum: either the parents accept them both as a couple, or they cannot have a relationship with either of them.

Chaplains should be patient with this reaction by EnCourage members, and understand that it will take time for parents to be comfortable enough to think of their children having same-sex partners, much less with the idea of meeting and getting to know them. Each member should be given the time he or she needs to come to this point on his or her own. Special concern should also be given to the reality that parents sometimes come to this acceptance at different times and with different degrees of ease. Patience is needed both within the EnCourage chapter and between the couple themselves.

Still, the goal is to help parents to accept their children with love, and this will mean at least being able to show respect to the child’s partner. It is often helpful for the chaplain to encourage members to pay attention to the goodness inherent in their loved ones, and that they are not in the habit of spending their time or making friends with bad people. EnCourage members need to remember that “people should not be defined only by their sexual tendencies,” and apply this not only to their loved ones but to

their partners as well. Although the members cannot support the romantic relationship between them as something good, their children and their children's partners remain people created in the image and likeness of God, always worthy of respect and charity.

While it may be difficult to accept that a loved one's "friend" means more than that to the son or daughter, in general it is better to get to know the people in a loved one's life whenever possible. Father Harvey's advice was always to acknowledge and welcome a son or daughter's partner with respect, without treating them as a couple. For example, it is a kindness to send a greeting or gift to a loved one's partner for a birthday or Christmas, but sending a joint gift as one would to a married couple would give the wrong message. Likewise, it can be a kindness to invite both of them to visit for Christmas or summer vacation, as one would for other friends of family members. But to provide shared sleeping quarters would seem to condone the romantic and sexual relationship between them and thus would be inappropriate.

This is sometimes a fine line to walk, but as a general rule parents can accomplish this by making a distinction between the person and his or her actions. Take the example of inviting a son or daughter's partner to visit the family home for Christmas. A conversation in preparation for the visit might go like this:

"We're looking forward to having both of you visit for Christmas. I hope that you'll both feel comfortable spending time with

the family. Where you sleep is up to you. We can provide rooms for both of you—you in your old bedroom, and your partner in the guest room. If you'd prefer another arrangement, there's a hotel not far from here, and you can make that decision on your own. Come over first thing in the morning and stay as long as you like; we're not going to make you feel bad because you prefer to stay there together. I'll respect the decision you make about where you stay; I just ask you to respect my decision about what I can and can't provide."

This idea of mutual respect will be important when there are younger family members present and the parents need to ask the loved one and his or her partner to refrain from public displays of affection or talking about themselves as a couple in front of these younger family members. Again, the chaplain can help the members to frame their response in a kind way:

"You know that we love you, and that we respect your partner. We're not asking you to change who you are to be worthy of being loved and respected. But we are asking you to understand that the relationship you're in is not something that your younger siblings/cousins/etc. are old enough to understand, and if you are affectionate in front of them it is likely to raise questions in their minds that we are not able to answer fully for them right now. Out of respect for them and for us, we need to ask you to adjust how you would normally relate, at least when the younger children are around."

Such an attitude toward the loved one's partner definitely takes time to develop, and

the EnCourage chaplain and other members should be patient with each one's pace and perspective. At times, especially at the beginning of adjusting to this reality in a loved one's life, the EnCourage member may simply feel unable to be together with the loved one's partner without experiencing distress, sadness or anger. This is not a moral failing, and no one should be condemned or dismissed as "homophobic" because they are not yet ready for an encounter or conversation. Moreover, it may become clear in individual situations that, despite the best efforts of the EnCourage member to make distinctions, the loved one and/or the partner would take any contact as their condoning or approving of the same-sex intimate relationship. In these cases, the EnCourage member may decide in good conscience that it is not possible at the present time to have contact with the loved one's partner.

These and other situations will often involve a bit of trial and error to get them right. In this regard the more experienced members of the EnCourage chapter will be able to assist by sharing their own experience. The chaplain should also remind the members that they are not able to control the reactions of their loved ones, and that with all the best intentions their decisions may still provoke hurt or anger in their sons or daughters. In such a case the chaplain should be ready to console the members and remind them that their efforts to always "speak the truth in love" (Eph 4:15) will bear fruit in the long term, even if they cause pain in the short term.

Same-sex Marriages and Family Life

The question of whether a member may attend a loved one's same-sex wedding ceremony and reception will come up often in EnCourage meetings. Unfortunately, parish priests and other family members often confuse the issue by giving mixed messages along the lines of the "total acceptance vs. total rejection" dichotomy that was discussed above. Chaplains need to be prepared to give a full explanation of the appropriate response to same-sex weddings, as well as to provide guidance in how to handle the situation in the family.

As a rule, it is best for Catholics, even parents and family members, not to go to any wedding ceremony that is invalid according to Canon Law. This applies to same-sex ceremonies as well as those when a Catholic is getting married "outside the Church" --- by a justice of the peace or other minister without a dispensation from the Church --- which often happens when one person has been married before.

There are two reasons for this: The first is that one must always avoid cooperating in another person's bad action. It is very difficult to see how attending a wedding and/or reception is not saying, at least implicitly, "I support what the couple is doing." The other is the obligation to avoid giving scandal, that is, confusing other people about the truth and importance of what the Church teaches about faith and morals. Even if people are personally convinced that attending a wedding is not giving support to what the couple is doing, they cannot avoid the reality that other people at the wedding may construe their presence and participation to

mean just that. Avoiding scandal is a necessary part of bearing witness to the faith.

It is certainly understandable when EnCourage members feel they have no choice but to attend the wedding, if only for the sake of keeping some kind of communication open with the son or daughter. Ultimately this is not the way to accomplish what they desire, since they would have to compromise with the truth and with their own conscience in order to preserve contact with the son or daughter. It must be said that if the only way to maintain a relationship is to give in to a demand to do something one

knows to be wrong, it will not be a healthy relationship for long.

Chaplains can advise EnCourage members who have decided not to attend the wedding to communicate that decision with their loved ones as soon as possible, and in person rather than by phone, email or letter. Of course, they should prepare to convey their decision with as much love and compassion as possible, knowing that the only person's reaction they can control is their own.

4

“To assist other family members and friends to reach out with compassion and truth to, and not to reject, their loved ones who experience same-sex attractions.”

Unity

Many EnCourage parents, though not all, attend meetings as a couple. When both parents are able to support one another and are united in their attitudes and relationships with the loved one who identifies as LGBTQ, this strengthens each of them and their family as a whole. Even when the parents view the situation and the appropriate response to it differently, the willingness of spouses to try to understand each other is important. The EnCourage chaplain will encounter more than a few couples who attend together, but are obviously not at the same point of understanding or acceptance. The chaplain and members with more experience can help these couples to be patient with each other, as well as to share their different perspectives with the group. This may require some careful accompaniment: at times one spouse may be very vocal, and the other reticent; at other times, their sharing may threaten to devolve into a public argument. Again, the EnCourage chapter ought to be a safe place for all members to express whatever fears, doubts or pain they are carrying. Attentive listening and good

boundaries will keep these conversations fruitful for all.

It is common, however, for EnCourage members to relate that other family members—the spouse, their children, their parents or extended family—are not supportive of their faith or the way that they are trying to relate to the loved one who identifies as LGBTQ. Whether the relatives take the “total acceptance” route, or simply prefer not to talk about the situation at all, they can bring tremendous pressure to bear on the EnCourage member. At times this pressure can seem worse than the disagreements they are having with the loved one who experiences same-sex attractions. They can begin to doubt themselves and whether staying true to the Church’s teaching is worth it in the midst of family turmoil.

In these circumstances, too, chaplains should allow EnCourage members to express the pain that comes from such difficult family situations. But they should also remind the EnCourage members that it is not disrespectful or uncharitable to ask

extended family members to allow them the freedom to make their own choices and handle their relationships with their children as they think best. Often this is best conveyed together with an acknowledgement of the relative's good intentions: "I know how close you are to X, and I've always been happy that you have a good relationship. Please keep loving X as you have been all these years. But please love and respect me enough to realize that I love X, too, and to let us handle our own relationship."

Privacy and Confidentiality

It is sometimes said by EnCourage members that, "When our children came out of the closet, we went in." Many EnCourage members feel embarrassed by the situation in their family, as if it reflected poorly on their parenting or on their ability to hand on the faith. This is an important reason for the chaplain to remind the chapter periodically about the importance of confidentiality.⁸⁶ But it is also an opportunity to remind the individual member that focusing too much on their discomfort with the situation may distract them from paying attention to the needs of their loved one.

Modern social media poses a particular problem for EnCourage members who are uncomfortable sharing this detail of their family life with others. Often the loved one who identifies as LGBTQ is open about this reality on social media, sharing photos with the partner, announcing relationship milestones, and linking to pro-LGBTQ websites. Some EnCourage parents even relate that

they first heard about a significant event in their loved one's relationship through a friend or relative who saw a post on social media. It is easy for an EnCourage member to panic and think the worst of such news, assuming that the whole world is now aware of the situation and is judging their family. This is another opportunity for the chaplain to receive their worry and pain with compassion, while trying to help them to keep things in perspective. Their response to social media posts can be the same as their response to relatives face-to-face: "I appreciate your concern for my child, but I really don't want to discuss our relationship with anyone. Please feel free to get in touch with him or her directly to say how you feel and ask any questions."

Other Family Relationships

The majority of EnCourage members, since the beginning of this part of the apostolate, have been parents whose sons and daughters experience same-sex attractions. But EnCourage is not restricted to parents, and the EnCourage chaplain should be prepared for the different questions that will arise from members in other situations.

Siblings of people who experience same-sex attractions will often find themselves in the same position as parents—facing a choice between total acceptance and total rejection, and looking for another way. When their choice of the right way to relate to their siblings differs from that of their parents, it can bring another burden of not wanting to choose sides or create another division in the

⁸⁶ See discussion of confidentiality on page 37, above.

family. Everything that has been said so far about accompaniment, respect and acceptance applies here, not only in their efforts to understand the loved one who experiences same-sex attractions, but in their efforts to support and understand their parents as well. *Grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other relatives* can find themselves in similar situations, having to navigate their relationships not only with the loved one who identifies as LGBTQ, but with his or her parents as well.

Spouses of people who experience same-sex attractions deserve particular support, especially when the spouses who identify as LGBTQ have been unfaithful to them in a same-sex relationship. It is a sad reality of the modern world that a person who abandons a spouse, and often children, to pursue a same-sex relationship is seen not as being unfaithful to his marriage vows, but as heroically being true to himself or herself, and his or her “real identity.” People who thought they could expect support from friends and family when dealing with an unfaithful spouse find themselves misunderstood, criticized and told to “let it go.” Chaplains should be ready to provide all the support they would to any other EnCourage member, as well as the support and resources they would provide to parishioners facing infidelity and divorce. Chaplains should also help members with children to become aware of available research on the impact of same-sex parenting on children, so that they

can make good decisions regarding custody of children after a divorce.

Sons and daughters whose parent comes out as LGBTQ also face many particular challenges. In addition to the realities of infidelity and divorce that have just been mentioned, there is also the question of how to stay connected when the parent who identifies as LGBTQ has a new partner. This is never easy, as has already been seen, but it poses further difficulties when the son or daughter has a family of his or her own. Balancing a desire for children to know their grandparents with a real concern not to expose them to situations contrary to faith and morals will require some difficult conversations with their parents. As always, the EnCourage meeting is a good place to discuss these concerns and perhaps talk out how such discussions might go.

In all of these situations, the EnCourage chaplain would do well to familiarize himself with good books about family dynamics, healthy communication, and related topics. It would also be worthwhile for him to collaborate when possible with people who have professional training and experience in counseling married couples and families through difficult times. If members of a chapter seem to be coming up against these difficult issues often, it could be helpful to invite professionals to make a short presentation to the chapter, from which they could draw insights for their particular situations.

5

“To witness to their loved ones by their own lives that fulfillment is to be found in Jesus Christ through His Body, the Church.”

Witness

The Fifth Goal of EnCourage completes a link with the First, and hopefully demonstrates that participation in EnCourage, like Courage, is a process, an ever-deepening commitment to ongoing conversion. While some, perhaps most, EnCourage members begin their journey with the apostolate looking for answers and a way to “fix” their loved one, the Five Goals lead them to seek not a solution to their loved one’s situation, but a real transformation in their own lives. Ultimately, they are able to look for healing and growth in their families and in their loved one’s life, not from anything external, but from their willingness to give witness to how God’s grace has led them to a place of deep trust, freedom and peace.

Does this mean that EnCourage members simply give in to the demands of society, and stop caring about what the Church teaches? Certainly not. But their participation in EnCourage is meant to lead them to a radically different type of surrender: a willingness to hand everything over to the Will of God, and to the timing and strategies of

Divine Providence; to recognize that God the Father and the Church, our Mother, also have plans for their children, and will not be slow in carrying them out.

Chaplains should likewise give witness to EnCourage members about how to make such a surrender, and the freedom that comes from it. The priestly vocation requires a total dedication to the Will of God, as it is expressed in the spirituality of the priest and the promise of obedience he makes to his bishop. But the promise that is made in a moment at ordination must be lived out through a lifetime, and the chaplain will know how difficult it can be to remain docile to God’s will in the midst of the changes and challenges of life.

A 20th-century American Jesuit priest, Father Walter Ciszek, wrote eloquently about how difficult it can be to make a total surrender. He had been arrested by the KGB and held in solitary confinement in Moscow for five years, and at a certain point he had a crisis of faith that led him to deep despair. In the next moment he felt God holding him

up and inviting him, as it were in the Garden of Gethsemane, to surrender his will to the Will of God. Reflecting on that moment, Father Ciszek later wrote that

I had always trusted in God. I had always tried to find his will, to see his providence at work. ... [But] up to this time, I had retained in my own hands the reins of all decision, actions, and endeavors. ... I remained ... in essence the master of my own destiny.

I had talked of finding and doing his will, but never in the sense of totally giving up my own will. I had talked of trusting him, indeed I truly had trusted him, but never in the sense of abandoning all other sources of support and relying on his grace alone.

I could never find it in me, before, to give up self completely. There were always boundaries beyond which I would not go, little hedges marking out what I knew in the depths of my being was a point of no return. . . . I had trusted [God], I had cooperated with his grace—but only up to a point. Only when I had reached a point of total bankruptcy of my own powers had I at last surrendered. That moment, that experience, completely changed me.⁸⁷

With these insights in mind, the EnCourage chaplain can help members who began their journey with a sense of powerlessness to see in their situation an invitation to finally hand everything over to God, without holding back their own opinions, their own timetable, their own agendas. No crisis or suffering can happen in one's life without

God at least permitting it, or sometimes provoking it, and the task of every disciple is to strive to understand what God is trying to teach or accomplish by permitting the suffering. Chaplains can guide EnCourage members to see in their experience of powerlessness an opportunity to cling more closely to God and his grace.

Another model of this kind of surrender is the great Saint Paul. In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, he gives his "credentials" by recounting all of the trials he has been through as an apostle and missionary, as well as some of the mystical experiences with which he has been consoled by God. It is clear that Saint Paul was a man of extraordinary virtue, wisdom and personal strength. But as he tells it, the key to his ability to persevere in his mission came from the fact that God permitted suffering in his life:

To keep me from being too elated ... a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor 12:7-10).

It is common to hear EnCourage members say that they are praying that God will "just make everything go away;" that God

⁸⁷ Walter J. Ciszek, *He Leadeth Me* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1973), 76-78.

will find a way that the experience of same-sex attractions will no longer be an issue for their loved one and their family. Chaplains can certainly sympathize with this desire, and should greet such admissions with patience and understanding. But the goal is to help EnCourage members see God's apparent unwillingness to "make everything better" as an invitation to trust and rely on him more completely. Like Saint Paul, they may not have been able to learn this in any other way, and so God in his wisdom is permitting their current situation ultimately for their healing and growth.

One more image from Sacred Scripture may be helpful for chaplains trying to guide EnCourage members in living the Fifth Goal: that of Our Lady at the foot of the Cross. She was, first and foremost, his mother, and as she witnessed the suffering of Jesus on the Cross, which she was powerless to control, every maternal instinct in her Immaculate Heart must have cried out, "Not him; me! Let me take his suffering. Let me carry it instead." But she was also his first and most perfect disciple, and in the midst of her powerlessness to spare her Son from suffering, she found her strength in her hopeful submission of her own will to the Will of God the Father.

Parents always want to save their children from suffering and pain, but are so often powerless to do so. The invitation of Our Lady of Sorrows is to find peace, consolation and strength in trustful surrender to God's plan and God's timing for their children's conversion, healing and salvation.

Of course, Our Lady, while powerless to stop the Crucifixion or take away Jesus's pain, was nevertheless not idle on Calvary. She surely prayed and sang psalms so that Jesus could hear them and be consoled, even as he struggled to draw enough breath to pray with her. Most importantly, she stood where he could see her, and did not leave his side throughout his final agony.

EnCourage members may not be able to change their loved ones' minds or spare them struggles, but they can stand by them and intercede for them with affection and deep concern. By giving good example, sharing cheerfully and without judgment or compulsion the joy and freedom they have found in living the faith, they extend an invitation to their loved ones that may take time to accept but will surely bear fruit.

Pope Benedict XVI wrote poignantly of the act of charity known as *consolation*:

To accept the "other" who suffers, means that I take up his suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also. Because it has now become a shared suffering, though, in which another person is present, this suffering is penetrated by the light of love. The Latin word *con-solatio*, 'consolation', expresses this beautifully. It suggests being with [*con-*] the other in his solitude [*solatio*], so that it ceases to be solitude.⁸⁸

The privilege of the EnCourage chaplain is to "be with" the members as they suffer and to console them, so that they in turn can draw strength to console and accept their loved ones.

⁸⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe salvi*, no. 38.

Appendix



The Holy Family, by Giovanni Battista Salvi da Sassoferrato, 1675.
(A copy hangs in the chapel of the Courage Office.)

Appendix

Guidelines for Publicizing Local Chapters • Guidelines for Personal Testimonies • Courage and The Twelve Steps • Questions of Sexual Identity and Gender Identity Discordance • Statutes of Courage International • Magisterial Documents

Guidelines for Publicizing Local Chapters

The following guidelines are provided by the Director of Communications, a staff member of the Courage Office, and are mandatory for all chapters of Courage and EnCourage upon publication of this Handbook. Please contact the Director of Communications with any questions regarding implementation of these Guidelines.

Use of the Courage Logo

A new version of the Courage International logo was designed and approved in 2019. It has been produced in several of the working languages of the apostolate, and high resolution files are available from the Courage Office upon request. Any new printed or electronic materials should use the new logo.

We welcome the initiative of some local chapters to create their own logos which represent the unique cultural character of their country or region. In order to maintain our branding at the international level, we ask that you follow these guidelines:

- The logo which has been produced by the regional chapter must include the

region in the title (ex. Courage Boston, Courage Philippines, etc.).

- The official Courage International logo must also be prominently displayed on the regional website/social media page.

Regional Websites and Social Media

Whenever a local Courage or EnCourage chapter or regional group seeks to establish a Courage or EnCourage website or social media account, they should always coordinate with the Director of Communications in the Courage Office (communications@couragerc.org), who will be able to offer direction regarding the content and look of the website and/or social media account.

In addition, the website/social media account should always include the following:

- Clear indication that this is the site/social media account for the *regional chapter*, and not for the *international apostolate*. The title of the page should always read as follows: **Courage/EnCourage [city, state, country, etc.]** Examples:
 - “Courage Pittsburgh”
 - “Courage Ohio”
 - “EnCourage Belgium”
- Websites and social media accounts must always contain the following disclaimer:

This website [Twitter account/Instagram account/etc.] is owned and maintained by Courage _____ [or EnCourage _____], which is solely responsible for the content. Views expressed are the sole responsibility of Courage _____ [or EnCourage _____] and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of Courage International, Inc. For information about the worldwide Courage apostolate (including media inquiries), please visit the Courage International website at www.couragerc.org.
- For websites, this disclaimer should be displayed in the footer of the website, or at least somewhere on the homepage.
- For social media accounts which do not allow for a lengthy disclaimer, a condensed version of this disclaimer is fine, so long as it is made clear that the page is managed by the local chapter, and not by Courage International. Please contact the Director of

Communications if you have any questions.

Website designers should ensure that the use of images do not violate any copyright laws. Images should not feature children, or anyone who could be mistaken for a minor. Avoid images which portray romantic physical affection between two persons of the same-sex.

Guidelines for Promoting Local Events

Local chapters may sponsor spiritual or informational events: retreats, days of recollection, “open houses” and the like. These can be opportunities to strengthen bonds among the members of the chapter and to attract potential members. The following guidelines cover the publicity for such events as well as the policies to be followed in registering participants.

Publicity

Promotional material should include the following:

- a clear indication that the event is specifically for those who accept the Church’s teaching on chastity for persons who experience same-sex attractions;
- a note that the event is for men and/or women 18 years of age and older;
- careful use of phrases like “experiences same-sex attractions” or “is living with same-sex attractions”, rather than “suffering from” or “afflicted with SSA”;
- the email address of the contact person (name can also be included, but isn’t required);

- the date(s) of the event and the name of the city/town in which event is taking place, but *not* the specific location.

Event information can be sent to the Director of Communications for inclusion in the events section of the Courage e-newsletter.

Use of images in promotional materials:

- Event organizers should ensure that the use of images does not violate any copyright laws.
- Images should not feature children, or anyone who could be mistaken for a minor.
- Avoid images which portray romantic physical affection between two persons of the same-sex. (Images portraying clearly platonic physical affection are fine.)

Screening of Participants

Inquirers who are not Courage or EnCourage members already known to the event organizer should be screened to ascertain that they support the Church's teaching on chastity for persons who experience same-sex attractions, and subscribe to the Five Goals of Courage and/or EnCourage, depending on the event. Screening involves a friendly email exchange in which the inquirer is asked to confirm that he or she:

- is an adult (a person must be 18 years or older to attend);
- experiences same-sex attractions (in the case of events specifically for Courage members); or

- has a loved one who experiences same-sex attractions (in the case of events specifically for EnCourage members); and
- agrees with the Five Goals of Courage or the goals of EnCourage, depending on the event. (A link to the applicable set of goals can be embedded in a response email.)

It is preferable to screen via email and not over the phone, because it provides you with a written record of the person's own confirmation that he or she is suited to attend the event. It is good to include a note in your email correspondence indicating that you do not mean to be officious; that this is just standard protocol for Courage and EnCourage events. Indicate that you are very much looking forward to their participation and encourage them to ask any further questions they may have.

Invitation to Register

Once it has been ascertained that the person is a Courage/EnCourage member (meaning they agree with the goals of the respective chapters), then he or she can be sent the precise event location, along with a link to registration. At this point, inform people that if they know of others who might also like to attend, they should not share the registration link directly with them; rather, they should refer those people to you, so you may screen them as well.

Guidelines for Personal Testimonies

This set of guidelines was developed by the Courage Office and should be shared with members as they plan their testimonies.

What is a testimony?

A personal testimony describes your conversion of heart to Jesus and his Church through the action of grace. Your testimony encourages others, fosters belief, and manifests the beauty of God's grace in your life.

Why give a testimony?

Your testimony glorifies God through Jesus Christ; it shares and clarifies the virtue of chastity; it promotes the value of the Courage apostolate; and it opens the hearts of listeners to their own conversions.

Preparing your testimony

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Pray before you begin. "Lord, what do you want me to say?" God will guide your words! Write your testimony out completely or make an outline, using a series of "prompts" to remind you of what you want to say. Keep your testimony to 30 minutes. Cover these three points:

- Describe your life before your conversion, giving various stories from your life as examples: Avoid specific sins or sordid details. Your testimony should reveal you as a real person, imperfect yet seeking holiness. There is no need to exaggerate, simply be truthful about your own experiences.
- Describe the events or realizations that caused or encouraged your conversion: Some conversions occur instantly; some occur over time. What brought you to the realization of your need for Jesus/chastity/Courage? Some conversions are dramatic; others are quiet. They are of the same value, and your conversion story will be a gift to listeners. You are speaking for those who cannot yet tell their stories.
- Describe how your conversion has changed your life: What is your life like now? How has your world view changed? Your testimony should help listeners know that Church teaching and chastity, possible through the love of Christ, are the answers, the only alternatives, to "living the gay lifestyle."

Presenting your testimony

Practice your testimony many times before you give it. When it's your time to present, pray before you begin, opening yourself to inner peace. Remember, the audience is with you! It is up to you to testify to the best of your ability; but it is up to the Almighty to plant the seeds from your testimony.

Honor your audience

Speak clearly with appropriate volume. Face the audience directly; look up from your notes and make eye contact; suppress any nervous gestures such as jingling your keys in your pocket or shuffling your papers; do not chew gum.

Practice humility

Avoid using an excess of quotes from the Bible or Catechism. You are there to tell your story in the light of what the Church teaches. Please avoid negative comments about others, other religions, other programs. We are only better than one person—the person we were before.

Be prepared

You may be challenged by those who, speaking out of misplaced compassion, feel that it is acceptable if two same-sex persons live together in a committed, long-term, monogamous relationship. It may be advantageous in your talk, or when answering questions, to touch upon the difference between two people of the same-sex living with each other in a sexual and romantic relationship, compared to two people of the same-sex living with each other chastely. One is bondage; the other is freedom.

After your testimony

Say a prayer of thanksgiving that you have been an instrument of our Lord! The Courage apostolate thanks you for your openness, your honesty and your bravery.

Courage and The Twelve Steps

The founding members of Courage gave the apostolate the priceless legacy of the Five Goals, which have always been the format and focus of every Courage meeting. Courage is not a “Twelve Step group” *per se*, though Father Harvey and the first members of Courage appreciated how the famous “Twelve Steps” of Alcoholics Anonymous could be one helpful method to consider in their pursuit of the Five Goals of Courage. Some Courage chapters still use reflections on the Twelve Steps to focus their efforts, as individuals and as a group, to grow in self-understanding and holiness.

Father Harvey always insisted that discussion of the Twelve Steps and the spirituality behind them should be contextualized within solid Catholic spiritual teaching. When he recommended books for chapters to use to consider the Twelve Steps (for example, Philip St. Romain’s *Becoming A New Person: Twelve Steps to Christian Growth*) it was because their authors made the point that everyone can benefit from following the path of repentance, conversion and atonement that the Twelve Steps represent.

Indeed, there are many connections between the Twelve Steps and a Catholic spiritual approach to conversion and growth in virtue. The first three steps, for example, find the answer to human frailty (“We admitted that we were powerless ...”) in a complete surrender to the loving power and providence of God (“We came to believe”

and “we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.”) They echo the sentiment expressed by Saint Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians: “[God] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. ... Therefore I am content with weaknesses, ... for when I am weak, then I am strong’ (2 Cor 12:9-10).

The next four steps speak of the importance of recognizing and admitting one’s sinfulness. The powerfully intimate nature of sins involving sexuality — fornication, pornography, masturbation, lust — often leads a person who is attached to these sins to experience great shame, which leads to an isolation that makes it very difficult to give them up. A tremendous freedom comes from taking responsibility for one’s own sin — sacramentally in Confession, as well as in honest conversations with close friends — and repenting of them. This inner freedom is the starting point for a renewed integrity and an ability to face daily trials and temptations with peace and perseverance.

A person’s sins do not just affect himself or herself, and so Steps 8 and 9 call people to recognize the impact that their sinful decisions have had on other people. A willingness to seek the good of others and to repair the damage that one’s sins have caused is a powerful antidote to the inherent selfishness of lust and sexual sins. Sometimes this charity is manifested in healing conversations

and renewed relationships with family members and friends. In other cases, it takes more indirect forms like prayers for loved ones or intercession for others who are trapped by the culture of lust and promiscuity rampant in today's secular society.

Step 10 is a reminder that the battle for holiness, and for the virtue of chastity, must be faced daily, and Step 11 proposes constant prayer and meditation on the will of God as the foundation of all of one's efforts. The Twelve Steps conclude in the same way as the Five Goals: with a call to reach out to others by giving good example and extending an invitation to experience first-hand the freedom and peace that the fellowship of Courage and its spiritual plan can provide.

Historically, the Twelve Steps were written to assist those struggling with a physical and emotional addiction to alcohol. To say that Courage draws inspiration from the Twelve Steps does not mean that Courage views same-sex attractions as a disease or addiction, though some members deal with issues of sexual brokenness such as compulsive attachments to pornography or promiscuous behavior, or obsessive sexual or romantic fantasies. The Twelve Step model may be particularly helpful to them, and its underlying spiritual principles are certainly in harmony with the Five Goals.

There are important differences, however, between Courage meetings and those of Twelve Step Groups. One is the definition of "one's Higher Power." The authors of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous wrote that they "came to believe [in] a power

greater than ourselves," and related to "God as we understood Him."⁸⁹ This approach to the Divine leaves room for members of A.A., who come from different faiths or none, wide latitude to approach the spiritual life according to their own consciences. As an apostolate of the Catholic Church, however, it should be clear that the "Higher Power" on which Courage members rely is the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—revealed to the world by Jesus Christ.

Another characteristic of A.A. and other Twelve Step groups is the role of the *sponsor*. A member with more experience in the group, and greater success in avoiding the addictive behaviors (that is, longer sobriety), acts as a mentor and guide for a person just beginning the process of "working the steps." While people in recovery from addiction testify to the powerful help that such peer-to-peer relationship provides, a great deal of prudence is necessary when the issue is same-sex attractions, to avoid the possibility of a close relationship becoming exclusive and then sexual. The chaplain of a Courage chapter serves as the "sponsor" for all of the members, providing mentoring and spiritual guidance for each. The members help one another by sincerely pursuing the Third Goal (forming an atmosphere in which everyone can share wisdom gained by experience) and the Fourth Goal (forming chaste friendships), rather than a formal sponsor-sponsee arrangement.

Finally, the chaplain should be conscious that the members of the chapter come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences,

⁸⁹ Cf. Steps 2, 3, 9, 11.

including their experience of temptation and sexual behavior. He cannot assume that all the members—particularly younger members—have necessarily engaged in sexual relationships or sins of impurity, nor that all of them are contending with habits or compulsions such that their “lives had become unmanageable.” So, an approach based primarily on “working the Steps” may not be helpful for every member of a chapter,

and in some cases may make a member who is not dealing with compulsive behaviors feel out of place or misunderstood. Moreover, the Twelve Step approach of completing the First Step by sharing a detailed account of one’s history of compulsive behaviors may be an occasion of scandal for some members, bringing up topics of sexual behavior to which they had not previously been exposed.

In summary, the following points are provided for the sake of clarity:

1. The plan of every Courage meeting is contained in the Five Goals of Courage, written by the first Courage members and approved by ecclesiastical authority.
2. While drawing inspiration from the spirituality underpinning the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, Courage is not a “Twelve Step group,” nor is it to be presumed that every member or potential member of Courage is contending with compulsive behaviors or addictions. It is not required to “work the Steps” in order to be a member of Courage.
3. A discussion of the spirituality of the Twelve Steps, as they relate to chastity, purity and overcoming compulsive behaviors, may be employed by chapters as a way to guide discussion among the members. Chaplains will carefully consider whether such an approach is appropriate given the history and experience of the members of the chapter. Discussion may be guided by the chaplain himself and/or by use of published materials that are in harmony with the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding purity, chastity, morality and spirituality. Questions regarding whether a particular resource fits this criterion should be referred to the Executive Director.
4. No chapter is required to use the Twelve Steps as described in number (3).
5. In any discussion of the Twelve Steps it must be clear that the only “Higher Power” to which Courage members refer is the One Triune God revealed by Jesus Christ.
6. Members are encouraged to share their stories openly and frankly in the chapter meeting. Respect for other members, however, means that such sharing should not include explicit details of sexual sins (which sometimes happens in the “First Step” admissions made in Twelve Step groups for people facing sexual addictions).
7. The role of a sponsor typically associated with Twelve Step groups is not part of the plan of the Courage chapter. Guidance and mentoring is provided by the chaplain and in the chaste friendships that develop in the chapter meeting.

Questions of Sexual Identity and Gender Identity Discordance

The question of sexual identity forms a significant part of our cultural and social conversations in the modern world, to an extent never envisioned by the founding members of Courage International. While the primary mission of Courage and EnCourage remains supporting people living with the experience of same-sex attractions, the apostolate is naturally called upon to provide guidance in regard to the “transgender” question as well. The following reflections are provided to guide Courage and EnCourage chaplains; however, they do not represent a change in the mission of Courage International.

Clarity Regarding Church Teaching

The claim is sometimes made that the Catholic Church has no settled teaching on issues of gender. However, Sacred Scripture states the matter clearly and succinctly: “Male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* likewise speaks in very certain terms: “*Being man or being woman* is a reality which is good and willed by God: man and woman possess

an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their Creator.”⁹⁰ Therefore, the *Catechism* continues, there is a moral response to be made to this truth: “Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his [or her] sexual identity.”⁹¹ God has willed to create each individual as a man or as a woman; and this is a gift and a blessing. Each person’s moral obligation is to respond to his or her sexual identity by accepting and cooperating with the plan of God.

As previously noted in the discussion of sexual attraction and its connection to identity,⁹² one’s choice of language to describe a person who is unable to “acknowledge and accept his sexual identity” is important to conveying the truth clearly, both about the person and about the Church’s teaching. It seems most useful to refer to “people who experience discordance⁹³ about their sexual identity,” rather than “a transgender person” or “a trans man” or “a trans woman.” Such a phrase puts the person at the forefront of the discussion, not the experience of

⁹⁰ *Catechism*, no. 369.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 2333.

⁹² See page 21, above.

⁹³ The American Psychological Association (APA), in its online “APA Dictionary of Psychology” defines *gender identity discordance* as follows: “A continuing sense that one’s anatomical sex is wrong, with a persistent wish to be the other sex. This phrase is sometimes used in place of *gender identity disorder* and *transsexualism* to avoid

connotations of pathology. See also *gender dysphoria*.” (dictionary.apa.org/gender-identity-discordance). This edition of the Handbook employs this language of *discordance* as a neutral way to describe the experience of feeling “that one’s anatomical sex is wrong” without assuming that a person experiencing such discordance is also experiencing dysphoria about his or her situation. Its use here is not intended to include or endorse any other statements or policies of the APA regarding the understanding or treatment of people experiencing such discordance.

discordance. It highlights the dignity of the person, created in the image and likeness of God, and the solidarity that this identity creates among all human beings.

To speak of a person's "experience" rather than his "struggle" allows that person to share his own story, his own situation. Moreover, the choice to speak of "discordance" about identity, rather than "rejection" or "denial" acknowledges that people come to experience discordance for a multitude of reasons.

Finally, the reality about which the person is experiencing confusion is his or her "sexual identity." Rather than the often ambiguous and politically charged notion of "gender identity," which is founded on the assumption that one's gender is fluid or disconnected from one's biological sex as male or female, "sexual identity" is the terminology used by the *Catechism* to identify one's identity as male or female,⁹⁴ maintaining the link between the body and the soul.

Support for Families

EnCourage chapters in various places are already serving families of people with confusion over their sexual identity. As of the publication of this Handbook, permission is extended to all EnCourage chapters to welcome such members *ad experimentum*; that is, on an informal basis in order to gauge the effectiveness of such pastoral care and its impact on the chapter and the EnCourage apostolate generally. An eventual decision to formalize this as part of the EnCourage

apostolate on a permanent basis would require an amendment of the canonical Statutes; such a decision is the sole authority of the Episcopal Board.

Parents and other family members whose loved ones identify as transgender pursue the same Five Goals of EnCourage. They may participate in the chapter as a whole or, when there is a sufficient number, they may be invited to meet as a distinct group, at least periodically. Whether meeting together or separately, the chaplain should keep in mind some particular needs of these members of the chapter.

In pursuit of the Second Goal, that is, "to gain a deeper understanding of the needs, difficulties, and challenges experienced by" their loved ones, chaplains should be aware of the particular topics connected to the experience of gender dysphoria, and the ways that it is discussed and addressed in secular society. They must be honest about the risks and outcomes of medical and surgical interventions, and frankly dissuade parents from the notion that the way to help their son or daughter is to facilitate such treatment. They should also be able to communicate the reality that the experience of confusion over sexual identity is not as simple as biological predetermination, but also includes emotional and psychological issues that require particular attention and professional assistance. In particular, parents of minor children should be aware of potential legal ramifications of their decisions regarding school, counseling and treatment for their children. These specialized questions are

⁹⁴ See *Catechism*, nos. 2333 and 2393.

outside the competence of the EnCourage chaplain, but he should be ready to point parents to resources and assistance consonant with Catholic faith and morals; for example, through the medical, psychological and/or legal professionals who collaborate with the diocesan Catholic Charities or Family Life Offices.

Likewise, with regard to pursuing the Third and Fourth Goals of EnCourage—maintaining healthy relationships with the loved one and with the whole family—the experience of gender dysphoria raises special concerns. For example, the process of “transitioning” or living as if one were of the opposite sex has a particularly painful effect on parents and siblings when the son or daughter announces that he or she is now to be called by a new name and new pronouns. The first people to recognize the sex of the son or daughter were the parents, who considered that profound reality when making their first gift to their offspring: the gift of his or her name. Talking this out with the parents, giving them an opportunity to express this pain, and perhaps suggesting ways to find a middle ground with the son or daughter (an old nickname that is not connected with the given name, for example), can be of assistance in maintaining as close a relationship as possible.

Accompaniment of Individuals

As already noted, the mission of the Courage chapter is to provide pastoral care for people who experience same-sex attractions, a reality that is different in significant ways from the experience of confusion about

one’s sexual identity. For this reason, it is not possible to invite a person who is experiencing such confusion, and/or who has “transitioned” and is living as the opposite sex, to the group setting of the Courage chapter. However, people in these situations who are sincerely seeking to understand and embrace God’s will for their lives have a right to the pastoral care of the Church, and chaplains are invited and encouraged to meet with them individually. Some considerations should be kept in mind.

At the heart of God’s will for them, as has already been seen, is that they should be able to “acknowledge and accept” their sexual identity. At the core of human identity is the reality that every human being is a son or daughter of God, created in God’s image and likeness, redeemed by Christ and called to holiness. Every discussion of personal identity begins with this truth, for it is in the same context—indeed, the same breath—that Sacred Scripture reveals the importance of sexual identity in God’s plan: “In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

The next step, then, is to understand God’s plan for men and women as male and female: how should their complementary natures be understood, and their complementary roles be lived out? An effective way to approach this is through the lens of maternity and paternity, of motherhood and fatherhood. The modern cultural conversation separates gender from sex, and assumes that gender roles are purely socially-conditioned ideas, stereotypes that are not only outdated but oppressive. But complementarity of the

sexes is not only a biological reality but also a metaphysical one; there are differences between men and women – “physical, moral and spiritual” – that apply to every person regardless of place, time or culture.

Pope Saint John Paul II situated the reality of sexual complementarity in the reality of motherhood and fatherhood, with an analysis that is worth considering carefully:

Motherhood implies from the beginning a special openness to the new person: and this is precisely the woman’s “part.” ... Scientific analysis fully confirms that the very physical constitution of women is naturally disposed to motherhood—conception, pregnancy and giving birth—which is a consequence of the marriage union with the man. At the same time, this also corresponds to the psycho-physical structure of women. ... Motherhood is linked to the personal structure of the woman and to the personal dimension of the gift.

Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman’s womb. The mother is filled with wonder at this mystery of life, and “understands” with unique intuition what is happening inside her. This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings — not only towards her own child, but every human being — which profoundly marks the woman’s personality. It is commonly thought that women are more capable than men of paying attention to another

person, and that motherhood develops this predisposition even more.⁹⁵

Pope John Paul’s insight that there is a specifically *maternal* way of loving, and that it is connected to the “physical and personal structure” of the woman demonstrates that there is an essential connection between sexuality and vocation — because every woman, by virtue of being a woman, is capable of becoming a mother, God gives every woman, by virtue of being a woman, the ability to love as a mother needs to love. Likewise, every man, by virtue of being a man, and therefore potentially a father, has been given the ability to love as a father loves.

The first thing to tell a person who is confused about his sexual identity is the good news that God has not created him by accident, but with a purpose: he is made to love. Moreover, his sexual identity is not an accident either: if God has made him male, then he is made to love *as a father loves*, as a husband loves, as a man loves; if God has made her female, then she is made to love *as a mother loves*, as a wife loves, as a woman loves. Then comes the invitation, and the challenge: to realize and accept that one will never be happy trying to relate to others, and to love others, in a way different from the way one is created to love. Transitioning to the opposite gender in an effort to find love and acceptance will never reach its goal.

A Catholic psychologist with long experience working with patients who experienced gender dysphoria noted that, “Most

⁹⁵ Pope Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* on the Dignity and Vocation of Woman (1988), no. 18.

young boys and girls who come seeking sex-reassignment come with psychosocial issues—conflicts over the prospects, expectations and roles that they sense are attached to their given sex—and presume that sex-reassignment will ease or resolve them.”⁹⁶ The Courage chaplain cannot single-handedly address or resolve these conflicts over expectations and roles, but he can help the individual to reconsider his or her assumptions in light of his vocation, that is, the expectations that God has for the individual, and the role he wills that each son or daughter of his should play in the family, in the Church and in the world. If a capacity for loving like a father or like a mother is innate, a desire to love in that way is likewise an inborn gift from God. Gradually, gently helping a person to consider and appreciate those capacities and desires, and to find ways to exercise them, can expand that person’s horizons and ability to imagine what life might be like,

and what God has in mind. Conversations with a therapist who shares the Church’s understanding of anthropology and sexual identity will also be helpful.

Therefore, the chaplain must speak from experience about the goodness of being a child of God, and of the call to spiritual fatherhood and spiritual motherhood, which are not “consolation prizes” but real, primordial, foundational relationships of love. Such a discussion is a challenge and an invitation to get to know oneself better, and to become more fully oneself by entering into loving relationships. Speaking about people’s strengths and abilities gives them a reason to consider what they might *like* about their created sex, rather than focusing on what aspects of sexual identity are painful and confusing.

⁹⁶ Paul McHugh, “Transgenderism: A Pathogenic Meme”, *Public Discourse*, 10 June 2015, www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/06/15145/. Accessed 15 May 2017.

Statutes of Courage International

This section contains selections from the Statutes of Courage International most relevant to chaplains and others interested in understanding the apostolate and its status as an association of the Christian faithful. Omitted sections are noted. The full text of the Statutes may be obtained from the Courage Office.

PART I. IDENTITY AND MISSION

Article 1: Name

1.1. The canonical name for this Diocesan, Clerical, Public Association of the Christian Faithful shall be “Courage International” (hereinafter, “Courage International” or “the Association”).

Article 2: Seat

2.1. The seat for Courage International shall be located in the county of Fairfield, the State of Connecticut, United States of America. The Episcopal Board may determine a different seat for Courage International and, through the Secretary, shall amend these Statutes according to proper canonical procedure to reflect that decision.

Article 3: Governing Law

3.1. Courage International, as a diocesan, clerical, public association of the Christian Faithful, shall be governed by all relevant and applicable norms of the Code of Canon Law as well as by these Statutes (cf. canons 298, §1; 302; and 312 - 320).

3.2. Courage International, as a civil Corporation in the State of Connecticut, shall also

be governed by all relevant civil laws, including the Bylaws of Courage International, Inc. All civil laws to which the Code of Canon Law and these Statutes yield are to be observed in canon law with the same effects, insofar as they are not contrary to divine law and unless canon law provides otherwise (cf. canons 22 & 1290).

Article 4: Purpose

4.1. In exercising the *cura animarum*, the clerical members of Courage International provide pastoral care to persons who experience same-sex attractions who, because of the condition of their life, do not always have sufficient common and ordinary pastoral care (cf. canon 771, §1). The clerical members of Courage International also provide appropriate catechesis on the Church’s teaching on homosexuality. In providing this sacerdotal ministry through local Courage Chapters, the clerical members of the Association guide those who experience same-sex attractions to strive toward the following five goals:

4.1.1. to live chaste lives in accordance with the Catholic Church’s teaching on homosexuality (Chastity);

4.1.2. to dedicate one’s life to Christ

through service to others, spiritual reading, prayer, meditation, individual spiritual direction, frequent attendance at Mass, and the frequent reception of the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist (Prayer and Dedication);

4.1.3. to foster a spirit of fellowship in which all may share thoughts and experiences, and so ensure that no one will have to face the problems of homosexuality alone (Fellowship);

4.1.4. to be mindful of the truth that chaste friendships are not only possible but necessary in a chaste Christian life and, in doing so, to provide encouragement to one another in forming and sustaining them (Support);

4.1.5. to live lives that may serve as good examples to others (Good Example/Role Model).

4.2. Flowing from this purpose, Courage International provides pastoral care to family members and friends of persons with same-sex attractions through an apostolate that shall be called EnCourage, which helps family members and friends of persons with same-sex attractions:

4.2.1. to grow spiritually through spiritual reading, prayer, meditation, individual spiritual direction, frequent attendance at Mass, and the frequent reception of the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist (Prayer and Dedication);

4.2.2. to gain a deeper understanding of the needs, difficulties, and challenges experienced by men and women with same-sex attractions (Formation);

4.2.3. to establish and maintain a healthy and wholesome relationship with their loved ones with same-sex attractions (Charity);

4.2.4. to assist other family members and friends to reach out with compassion and truth, and not to reject, their loved ones with same-sex attractions (Unity);

4.2.5. to witness to their loved ones by their own lives that fulfillment is to be found in Jesus Christ through His Body, the Church (Witness).

Article 5: Objectives

5.1. The objectives of Courage International are as follows:

5.1.1. to establish local Courage Chapters for men and women with same-sex attractions, and local EnCourage Chapters for family members of those with same-sex attractions, in collaboration with the diocesan bishop and in keeping with the goals of Courage and EnCourage;

5.1.2. to conduct clergy study days for diocesan presbyterates and deacons as well as study days for seminaries for the purpose of assisting parish priests, chaplains in special ministries, and others charged with the care of souls to conduct proper pastoral care of men and women with same-sex attractions and their families;

5.1.3. to provide the Church with various resources and tools to address the question of homosexuality in catechesis and evangelization;

5.1.4. to conduct international,

national, and regional conferences and retreats for:

- (a) men and women with same-sex attractions;
- (b) family members and friends of those with same-sex attractions;
- (c) clergy;
- (d) seminary faculties and students;
- (e) physicians, mental health professionals, and those in training for these professions;
- (f) and those in various pastoral works (especially to youth and in support of family life);

5.1.5. to respond to requests from media for interviews relating to the Church's teaching on homosexuality and her norms for pastoral care of those with same-sex attractions.

Article 6: Right of Initiative

6.1. Courage International is able on its own initiative to undertake additional apostolic and pastoral endeavors in keeping with its character and purpose (cf. canon 315).

6.2. It is the competency of the Episcopal Board to approve any proposal for new pastoral endeavors in keeping with the character and purpose of Courage International.

Upon granting approval of the new pastoral endeavor and, if applicable, any necessary revision or change to the Statutes, the Secretary is to record the document of approval in the Association archives and is to make due change to the official archived

copy of the Statutes.

PART II. GOVERNANCE

Article 7: Two-Tier Governance Structure

7.1. Courage International, as a diocesan, public, clerical association of the Christian Faithful, is subject to the vigilance of the Episcopal Board and any diocesan bishop where the Association is present, in order that the integrity of faith and morals is preserved in the Association and in order to watch so that abuse does not creep into ecclesiastical discipline (cf. canon 305 §1). The Episcopal Board therefore has the right and duty to inspect Courage International according to the norm of law and these Statutes.

7.2. Courage International is governed by a two-tiered structure. Ultimate and overall governance is the responsibility of the Episcopal Board. The day-to-day ordinary administration and direction of Courage International is the responsibility of the Executive Director who is assisted by an Associate Director and a Board of Directors.

Article 8: Episcopal Board

8.1. All members of the Episcopal Board are required to be diocesan bishops of the Catholic Church.

8.2. The Episcopal Board of Courage International shall have no fewer than three (3) or more than seven (7) members who together constitute the members of the civil corporation according to the Bylaws of

Courage International, Inc. (cf. Bylaws Article VI, Section 2).

8.3. The number of members of the Episcopal Board shall always be an odd number.

8.4. The Episcopal Board shall include the following individuals ex officio:

8.4.1. the diocesan bishop of the Archdiocese of New York or his designate (who is also to be a bishop of the Catholic Church);

8.4.2. the diocesan bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut.

8.5. In the event that the diocesan bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport is unavailable or unable to serve on the Episcopal Board, the diocesan bishop of another diocese may be invited by the Episcopal Board to serve.

Sections 8.6 through 8.15 discuss practical details of the election of the Episcopal Board members and the order of its meetings.

8.16. The vote of a simple majority of the members of the Episcopal Board at any annual, regular, or special meeting of the Episcopal Board shall be required for the following matters, inter alia:

8.16.1. the election of new individuals to the Episcopal Board;

8.16.2. the appointment of new individuals to the Board of Directors;

8.16.3. the removal of individuals from the Board of Directors;

8.16.4. to approve the Finance Officer of the Association after his or her election by the Board of Directors;

8.16.5. to make final proposal of changes to the Statutes;

8.16.6. to approve the following acts of ordinary administration of greater importance submitted to the Episcopal Board by the Board of Directors:

(a) the approval of any major capital project involving the alienation of ecclesiastical goods such as the sale, the assignment, the lease, the pledge, the transfer, or such other encumbrance which can worsen the stable patrimonial condition of the Association;

(b) the approval of any debt secured by the property, the revenues, or other assets of the Association;

(c) the approval of any unsecured debt in an amount greater than five percent (5%) of the operating budget of the Association;

(d) the approval of any contract that creates a financial obligation in excess of fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) for the Association; with the exception of the annual Courage Conference which shall be deemed approved during the associated year's budget process;

(e) the approval, either directly or through an appointed Bishop member of the Episcopal Board whom the Episcopal Board shall appoint on an annual basis, of expenditures of the Association between twenty-five thousand (\$25,000) and fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000);

8.16.7. to approve the annual budget;

8.16.8. to approve new apostolic endeavors in keeping with the character and stated purpose of Courage International.

8.17. The vote of a two thirds (2/3) majority of the members of the Episcopal Board at any annual, regular, or special meeting of the Episcopal Board shall be required for the following matters, inter alia:

8.17.1. to approve the following acts of extraordinary administration submitted to the Episcopal Board by the Board of Directors:

(a) the approval of the acquisition, alienation, mortgage, or the lease of ecclesiastical goods, including personal or real property, which constitutes a material portion of the assets of the Association such that it could worsen the stable patrimonial condition of the Association, or;

(b) the approval of the alienation, the assignment, or other disposition of all or a material portion of the assets of the Association;

8.17.2. to appoint or to remove the Executive Director;

8.17.3. to appoint or to remove an Associate Director;

8.17.4. to determine a new seat for Courage International;

8.17.5. to approve the dissolution of the Association after hearing Executive and Associate Directors (canon 320 §3).

Article 9: Board of Directors

9.1. The Board of Directors is comprised of individuals appointed by the Episcopal Board.

9.2. The Board of Directors may include priests and deacons, men and women Religious, and laity outstanding in firm faith, good morals, and prudence. Only those

members of the Board of Directors who are priests, however, are canonically valid members of Courage International.

9.2.1. The Board of Directors shall include a competent member of the mental health profession who embraces the Catholic Church's anthropology. The mental health professional may be a priest or deacon, religious man or woman, or a layperson outstanding in firm faith, good morals, and prudence.

9.2.2. Lay persons outstanding in firm faith, good morals, and prudence who are members of the Board of Directors may participate in the committees and/or subcommittees that the Board of Directors may establish in a stable manner or in an ad hoc manner from time to time as needs and circumstances may warrant.

9.3. Only those members of the Board of Directors who are priests shall have the right to vote on all matters coming before the Board of Directors.

9.4. The Board of Directors of Courage International shall have no fewer than five (5) and no more than seven (7) voting members. The Board of Directors shall not exceed nine (9) members in total.

9.5. The number of voting members of the Board of Directors shall always be an odd number.

9.6. Members of the Board of Directors, except for the Executive Director, shall serve for a term of three (3) years such that each year no more than a third of the members

of the Board of Directors have a term expiring.

Sections 9.7 through 9.20 discuss practical details of the election of the Board of Directors and the order of its meetings.

9.21. The Board of Directors is responsible for assisting and advising the Executive Director in the direction of the apostolic work of the Association. The responsibilities of the Board of Directors include, inter alia:

- 9.21.1. to determine the banks or depositories into which the Association will deposit all monies and administer assets;
- 9.21.2. to determine major apostolic projects and to submit the proposal for such projects to the Episcopal Board for approval;
- 9.21.3. to advise the Executive Director on the hire or termination of employment of all part-time and full-time employees of Courage International;
- 9.21.4. to accept the annual budget presented to it by the Finance Officer in order that it may be submitted to the Episcopal Board for approval;
- 9.21.5. to approve for submission to the Episcopal Board the following acts of ordinary administration of more importance:
 - (a) the approval of any major capital project involving the alienation of ecclesiastical goods such as the sale, the assignment, the lease, the pledge, the transfer, or such other encumbrance which can worsen the stable patrimonial condition of the Association;
 - (b) the approval of any debt secured by the property, the revenues, or other

assets of the Association;

(c) the approval of any unsecured debt in an amount greater than five percent (5%) of the operating budget of the Association;

(d) the approval of any contract that creates a financial obligation in excess of twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) for the Association; with the exception of the annual Courage Conference which shall be deemed approved during the associated year's budget process.

9.21.6. to approve for submission to the Episcopal Board the following acts of extraordinary administration:

- (a) the approval of the acquisition, alienation, mortgage, or the lease of ecclesiastical goods, including personal or real property, which constitutes a material portion of the assets of the Association such that it could worsen the stable patrimonial condition of the Association; or,
- (b) the approval of the alienation, the assignment, or other disposition of all or a material portion of the assets of the Association.

PART III. OFFICERS

Article 10: Officers of Courage International

10.1. The Officers of Courage International shall be the Moderator, whose title shall be the Executive Director; one or more Associate Directors; the Secretary; the canonical Administrator of the Association's ecclesiastical goods, whose title shall be the Finance Officer; and any other Officer as the

Board of Directors may establish from time to time.

10.2. The Offices of the Association are not understood by these Statutes to constitute ecclesiastical offices.

Sections 10.3 through 10.8 discuss practical details of the appointment, resignation and removal of the Officers of the Association and the procedure for filling vacancies.

Article 11: Executive Director

11.1. The canonical Moderator for Courage International shall have the title Executive Director.

11.2. The Executive Director is to be a priest selected by the Episcopal Board and who has received prior permission from his diocesan bishop, or from his religious superior if incardinated in a religious institute or superior if incardinated in a society of apostolic life, to serve in this capacity.

11.3. The Executive Director shall serve as staff, ex officio, to the Episcopal Board and participates at any annual, regular, or special meeting of the Episcopal Board except when the Episcopal Board meets in Executive Session. The Executive Director, as staff to the Episcopal Board, does not possess the right to vote in matters coming before the Episcopal Board.

11.4. The Executive Director shall serve, ex officio, on the Board of Directors. Since the Board of Directors does not appoint the Executive Director but is responsible for assisting, advising, and collaborating in close

concert with the Executive Director in the day-to-day ordinary administration and direction of the apostolic work of the Association, the Executive Director possesses the right to vote in all matters coming before the Board of Directors.

11.5. The term for the Executive Director is five (5) years renewable.

11.6. The responsibilities of the Executive Director include, inter alia:

11.6.1. to represent Courage International in all public matters;

11.6.2. to safeguard the integrity and mission of Courage International in all public matters by:

(a) designating and/or granting approval to individuals who would represent Courage International or speak on its behalf in all public matters;

(b) reviewing in advance and granting prior approval to the content of any public address which would represent Courage International in all public matters;

11.6.3. to oversee the Association's use of and engagement with the media;

11.6.4. to suggest and to submit policy proposals to the Episcopal Board and to the Board of Directors;

11.6.5. to implement strategic planning of the Association;

11.6.6. to present an annual report to the Episcopal Board and to the Board of Directors on the status of the Association and its apostolic activities;

11.6.7. to effect an ongoing fund-raising and development program for the Association;

11.6.8. to exercise the proper day-to-day administration of the Association in accord with the dogmatic and moral teachings of the Catholic Church as enunciated by the Roman Pontiff and the College of Bishops, in accord with canon law and these Statutes, as well as in accord with the policies adopted from time to time by the Episcopal Board;

11.6.9. to select individuals to serve as the Association's Finance Counselors to provide assistance to the Finance Officer;

11.6.10. to select Chaplains to serve as National Coordinators and Regional Coordinators in cooperation with the local bishops;

11.6.11. to cooperate with the Finance Officer in the preparation and submission of an annual budget to the Board of Directors and the Episcopal Board;

11.6.12. to supply a single signature authorizing any contract not in excess of twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) for the Association; with the exception of the annual Courage Conference which shall be deemed approved during the associated year's budget process;

11.6.13. to exercise the authority to sign and to execute in the name of the Association all contracts authorized, either generally or specifically, by the Board of Directors, unless the Statutes explicitly require an additional signature or the prior approval of the Episcopal Board to grant such authority;

11.6.14. to supervise the proper selection, employment, control and discharge of all paid full-time and part-time employees and staff of Courage International in such a way that in the

employment of workers, all civil laws concerning labor and social policy are duly observed according to the principles handed on by the Church (cf. canon 1286, 1°);

11.6.15. to determine the venue for the annual conference;

11.6.16. to request special meetings of the Episcopal Board when he deems it necessary to address special business requiring the Episcopal Board's authority;

11.6.17. to request special meetings of the Board of Directors when he deems it necessary to address special business requiring the Board of Directors' authority.

Article 12: Associate Directors

12.1. In order more readily to meet the demands and legitimate needs of the Association, an Associate Director serves as assistant to the Executive Director in a close and fraternal partnership. To this end, an Associate Director shall fulfill any function, activity, or duty that the Executive Director may assign from time to time.

12.2. An Associate Director is to be a priest selected by the Episcopal Board and who has received prior permission from his diocesan bishop, or from his religious superior if incardinated in a religious institute or superior if incardinated in a society of apostolic life, to serve in this capacity.

Articles 13 to 15 discuss the roles of other Officers of the Association: the Secretary (13), the Finance Officer (14) and the Finance Counselors (15).

PART IV. MEMBERSHIP*

Article 16: Admittance to Membership

16.1. Only the following are members of Courage International:

- 16.1.1. each diocesan bishop member of the Episcopal Board;
- 16.1.2. each priest member of the Board of Directors;
- 16.1.3. the Executive Director;
- 16.1.4. an Associate Director;
- 16.1.5. Chaplains of the Association, including National and Regional Coordinators.

16.2 Admittance to membership in Courage International by means of service on the Episcopal Board is provided in Article 8 of these Statutes. Admittance to membership in Courage International by means of service on the Board of Directors is provided in Article 9 of these Statutes. Admittance to membership in Courage International by means of service as Executive Director is provided in Article 11 of these Statutes. Admittance to membership in Courage International by means of service as Associate Director is provided in Article 12 of these Statutes. Admittance to membership in Courage International by means of service as a Chaplain, including National and Regional Coordinators, is provided in Article 24 of these Statutes.

16.3. Only clerics of the episcopal or

presbyteral orders are qualified (*habiles*) to be validly admitted as members of Courage International.

16.4. No one who has publicly rejected the Catholic faith, has defected from ecclesiastical communion, or has been punished by an imposed or declared excommunication may be received validly into Courage International (cf. canon 316, §1).

Article 17: Obligations and Rights of Membership

17.1. The members of Courage International are bound by the obligations and enjoy the rights in the Code of Canon Law relevant to all the Christian Faithful (cf. canons 208-223) and to clerics in particular (cf. canons 273-289).

17.2. In particular, members of Courage International:

- 17.2.1. are bound to believe with divine and Catholic faith all those things contained in the word of God, written or handed on, that is, in the one deposit of faith entrusted to the Church, and at the same time proposed as divinely revealed either by the solemn magisterium of the Church or by its ordinary and universal magisterium which is manifested by the common adherence of the Christian faithful under the leadership of the sacred magisterium and, consequently, are therefore bound to avoid any doctrines whatsoever contrary to them (cf. canon 750,

* "Membership" in the context of the Statutes refers to membership in *the public clerical association*. In common parlance, the "members" of the Courage and EnCourage apostolates are those who attend the meetings and/or are

connected to local Chapters and/or online groups because they experience same-sex attractions (Courage) or because a family member or loved one does (EnCourage) [Ed.].

§1);

17.2.2. are bound to embrace firmly and to retain each and every thing which is proposed definitively by the magisterium of the Church concerning the doctrine of faith and morals, that is, each and every thing which is required to safeguard reverently and to expound faithfully the same deposit of faith, particularly on matters of human sexuality and the question of homosexuality especially (cf. canon 750, §2);

17.2.3. are bound to make a religious submission of the intellect and will to a doctrine which the Supreme Pontiff or the college of bishops declares concerning faith or morals when they exercise the authentic magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim it by definitive act, and, consequently, are therefore bound to avoid those things which do not agree with it (cf. canon 752);

17.2.4. are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires (cf. canon 212, §2);

17.2.5. have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons (cf. canon 212, §3);

17.2.6. are to be united among themselves by a bond of brotherhood and prayer and are to strive for cooperation among themselves according to the prescripts of these

Statutes in furtherance of the purpose of Courage International and the building up of the Body of Christ (cf. canon 275, §1);

17.2.7. are to hold Courage International in esteem as a means to foster their own holiness in the exercise of their sacred ministry (cf. canon 278, §2);

Article 18: Loss of Membership

18.1. A member of Courage International may lose membership by completion of a term of service on the Episcopal Board, by voluntary withdrawal, or by dismissal.

18.2. A bishop serving on the Episcopal Board ceases membership in the Association upon completing his term of service.

18.3. An individual member may voluntarily withdraw himself from Courage International after having expressed in writing his intention of withdrawing to his diocesan bishop, who will inform the Executive Director in writing that he has relieved the member of his assignment as Chaplain. A copy of this letter, along with the acknowledgment reply of the Executive Director, is to be kept by the Secretary in the Association's archive.

18.4. No member of Courage International may be dismissed from the Association except for a just cause according to the norm of law (cf. canon 308) and these Statutes.

18.5. Anyone who has publicly rejected the Catholic faith, has defected from ecclesiastical communion, or has been punished by an imposed or declared excommunication will

be dismissed from membership in Courage International (cf. canon 316, §2).

18.6. For a member to be dismissed validly from Courage International:

18.6.1. The Executive Director must first make a preliminary investigation and consultation with the member's diocesan bishop and also with his religious superior if he is incardinated in a religious institute or superior if incardinated in a society of apostolic life. Record of this investigation and consultation having taken place is to be maintained in the archive of the Association; If the Executive Director is to be investigated, the preliminary investigation is conducted by an Associate Director or another priest appointed to the task by the Episcopal Board.

18.6.2. If a cause stated in 18.5 is present, the Executive Director, after receiving the consent of the Episcopal Board, is to dismiss the member in writing with the cause of dismissal stated at least in summary fashion. A copy of the dismissal is to be sent to the priest's diocesan bishop and also to his religious superior if he is incardinated in a religious institute or superior if incardinated in a society of apostolic life. The Secretary will maintain another copy of the dismissal in the Association's archives and will amend the Association's membership roll;

18.6.3. If some other just cause for dismissal beyond the causes stated in 18.5 is present such that the good of the Association would warrant a dismissal, the Executive Director is first to make the member aware in writing of the fact that

his membership is in jeopardy and with the reasons stated at least in summary fashion. Should the member in question not respond to the Executive Director's warning either in writing or by addressing the cause of the warning, the Executive Director, after receiving the consent of the Episcopal Board, is to dismiss the member in writing with the cause of dismissal stated at least in summary fashion. A copy of the dismissal is to be sent to the priest's diocesan bishop and also to his religious superior if he is incardinated in a religious institute or superior if incardinated in a society of apostolic life. The Secretary will maintain another copy of the dismissal in the Association's archives and will amend the Association's membership roll.

18.7. Persons dismissed from Courage International maintain the right to initiate hierarchical recourse to the diocesan bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport (cf. canon 316, §2).

PART V. ECCLESIASTICAL GOODS

Article 19: Ecclesiastical Goods

19.1. Courage International is capable of acquiring, retaining, administering, and alienating temporal goods according to the norm of law and these Statutes (cf. canon 1255).

19.2. By "temporal goods" is meant all non-spiritual assets, tangible or intangible, that

are instrumental in fulfilling the mission of the Church: land, buildings, furnishings, liturgical vessels and vestments, works of art, vehicles, securities, cash, and other categories of real or personal property.

19.3. By the law itself (canon 1257, §1), the temporal goods owned by Courage International are considered to be ecclesiastical goods and are subject to all relevant and applicable norms of the Code of Canon Law governing them as well as the specific norms of these Statutes.

19.4. Courage International owns ecclesiastical goods principally to order divine worship and to exercise works of the sacred apostolate in accord with its own character and purpose.

19.5. Courage International is able to solicit, accept and receive monies, legacies, gifts, grants, contributions, endowments and property of any kind, real or personal, and thereafter to hold, invest, reinvest and administer the same, and to pay over therefrom the income and/or principal in such amounts and at such times as these Statutes determine.

19.6. Unless the contrary is established, offerings of the Christian faithful given to the Episcopal Board, the Board of Directors, the Executive Director, an Associate Director, the National or Regional Coordinators, or Chaplain members are presumed given to Courage International and are to be recorded as such (cf. canon 1267, §1).

19.7. Offerings given to Courage International for a specific purpose may be applied only for that same purpose in keeping with the express intention of the donor (cf. canon 1267, §3).

19.8. Should Courage International be suppressed or otherwise terminated such that it ceases to exist, the ecclesiastical goods will be disbursed in accordance with Article 27 of these Statutes.

PART VI. CHAPTERS

Article 20: Definition of a Chapter

20.1. A Chapter is defined as a group of persons experiencing same-sex attractions who, by their voluntary participation, gather confidentially in community under the spiritual and pastoral guidance of a Chaplain of the Association (or in exceptional circumstances, his delegate) in order to strive toward the five goals of Courage International.

Article 21: Forming a Chapter

21.1. Persons interested in starting a Chapter of Courage International must begin by seeking the approval of the diocesan bishop who will assign a Chaplain pursuant to these Statutes and who may also designate a place for the Chapter to meet.

21.2. The Executive Director shall inform the Secretary of the establishment of the new Chapter to ensure that it is recorded properly in the archives of the Association.

Article 22: Chapter Meetings

22.1. Publicity for a Chapter of Courage International can be spread by word of mouth, in Catholic publications, parish bulletins and flyers on parish grounds, and via other Catholic media (radio and television programs; diocesan website and newspaper). Although a contact phone number and email address for the Chaplain are to be provided, care must be taken not to provide the location and times of meetings publicly in order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of those with same-sex attractions who seek the spiritual and pastoral assistance of Courage International.

22.2. Typically, Chapter meetings of Courage International take place on the grounds of a parish or other ecclesial institution, though at a time and place where confidentiality can be preserved.

22.3. Chapter meetings of Courage International ideally are to be held weekly, but no less than monthly.

22.4. Chapter meetings should begin and end with formal prayer. Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament at the start or conclusion of a Chapter meeting of Courage International is highly encouraged as of great spiritual benefit to the Chapter.

22.5. Chapter meetings of Courage International are to be conducted according to the Courage Handbook.

PART VII. CHAPLAINS**Article 23: Definition of a Chaplain**

23.1. A Chaplain of Courage International is a priest to whom his local ordinary has entrusted in a stable manner the pastoral care, at least in part, of persons experiencing same-sex attractions, who has at the same time been given the permission to become a member of Courage International, and who is received as a member of Courage International pursuant to these Statutes.

23.2. Chaplains are moderators of the local Chapters and as such represent Courage International at the local Chapter level and serve as the point of contact for all participants in the Chapter.

23.3. Chaplains serve as the point of contact between the Chapter and the Association.

Article 24: Appointment of Chaplains

24.1. Priests interested in membership in Courage International as Chaplains must first

24.1.1. express this interest to their local ordinary who, in accord with canon 564, must be willing to entrust him in a stable manner with the pastoral care, at least in part, of those persons experiencing same-sex attractions; and

24.1.2. after receiving this prior approval and appointment from his local ordinary, express to the Executive Director of Courage International his interest in being admitted to Courage International as a Chaplain pursuant to these Statutes.

24.2. The Executive Director is free to conduct a confidential examination into the character and recommendations of a potential priest Chaplain in order to ensure that the candidate for membership in the Association is of sound morals, proven fidelity to the Church's doctrinal and moral teaching, and is zealous in the pastoral activity proper to the charism of Courage International.

24.3. The Executive Director is to receive a written notice from the priest's local ordinary testifying to the priest's suitability for the apostolate of Courage International and the permission extended to him to engage in this pastoral ministry prior to admitting him to the Association. The Secretary is to maintain a copy of this written testimony in the archives of the Association.

The Executive Director is able freely to admit to membership or to deny membership to any priest seeking membership in Courage International. Upon admitting a priest as a Chaplain, the Executive Director is to inform the Secretary in order that the membership roll of the Association may be updated.

Article 25: Responsibilities of a Chaplain

25.1. The Chaplain is the moderator of each meeting of a Chapter. Ideally other priests in addition to the Chaplain can assist periodically at meetings to deepen their understanding of how best to assist those persons with same-sex attractions in Confession, with spiritual direction, and with pastoral counseling.

25.2. The Chaplain will be available to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance at each Chapter meeting and may periodically offer the Mass for the Chapter.

25.3. The Chaplain must conduct personal interviews with persons with same-sex attractions who express an interest in joining a Chapter of Courage International before they are invited to the Chapter and told of the time and location of the Chapter meeting. These interviews ensure that a prospective participant understands the goals of Courage International and that he or she will strive to keep them. The new participant must also agree to maintain the confidentiality required by the Chapter.

Article 26: National & Regional Coordinators

26.1. A National Coordinator is a Chaplain of Courage International entrusted with the responsibility to coordinate the pastoral activity of all fellow Chaplains of Courage International within a nation. A Regional Coordinator is a Chaplain of Courage International entrusted with the responsibility to coordinate the pastoral activity of all fellow Chaplains of Courage International within a specified region. Both National Coordinators and Regional Coordinators shall also serve as a conduit for communication between the Executive Director and the Chaplains of a particular nation or region.

26.2. National and Regional Coordinators are freely selected by the Executive Director provided that the Chaplain has first received the permission of his diocesan bishop, or religious superior if incardinated in a religious institute or superior if

incardinated in a society of apostolic life, to take on the duty of National or Regional Coordinator beyond the responsibility he already possesses as a Chaplain of Courage International.

26.3. National and Regional Coordinators shall also provide the Executive Director annual statistical reports relevant to the pastoral activity of Courage International within his nation or region such that the Executive Director may keep the Board of Directors as well as the Episcopal Board well informed of the Association's activities.

PART VIII. DISSOLUTION OF THE ASSOCIATION

Article 27: Dissolution of the Association

27.1. The Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport alone is competent to dissolve Courage International (cf. canon 320, §1) but only after having heard the Executive Director and

the Episcopal Board (cf. canon 320, §3).

Article 28: Disbursement of Ecclesiastical Goods

28.1. In the case of the suppression or dissolution of Courage International, the Episcopal Board is competent by means of a two-thirds majority vote to devise a plan in accord with these Statutes for the disbursement of all of the Association's ecclesiastical goods and the settlement of all liabilities.

PART IX. INTERPRETATION AND ALTERATION OF STATUTES

Articles 29 and 30 outline canonical norms for interpreting (29) and modifying (30) these Statutes. Both the Episcopal Board and the Board of Directors may propose changes, which are approved by a majority vote of the Episcopal Board.

Excerpts from

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Chastity and homosexuality

- 2357** Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same-sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity,¹⁴¹ tradition has always declared that “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.”¹⁴² They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.
- 2358** The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God’s will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord’s Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.
- 2359** Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Gen 19:1-29; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:10; 1 Tim 1:10.

¹⁴² CDF, *Persona humana* 8.

Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
Homosexualitas problema, October 1, 1986

The issue of homosexuality and the moral evaluation of homosexual acts have increasingly become a matter of public debate, even in Catholic circles. Since this debate often advances arguments and makes assertions inconsistent with the teaching of the Catholic Church, it is quite rightly a cause for concern to all engaged in the pastoral ministry, and this Congregation has judged it to be of sufficiently grave and widespread importance to address to the Bishops of the Catholic Church this *Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*.

2. Naturally, an exhaustive treatment of this complex issue cannot be attempted here, but we will focus our reflection within the distinctive context of the Catholic moral perspective. It is a perspective which finds support in the more secure findings of the natural sciences, which have their own legitimate and proper methodology and field of inquiry.

However, the Catholic moral viewpoint is founded on human reason illumined by faith and is consciously motivated by the desire to do the will of God our Father. The Church is thus in a position to learn from scientific discovery but also to transcend the horizons of science and to be confident that her more global vision does greater justice to the rich reality of the human person in his spiritual and physical dimensions, created by God and heir, by grace, to eternal life.

It is within this context, then, that it can be clearly seen that the phenomenon of homo-

sexuality, complex as it is, and with its many consequences for society and ecclesial life, is a proper focus for the Church's pastoral care. It thus requires of her ministers attentive study, active concern and honest, theologically well-balanced counsel.

3. Explicit treatment of the problem was given in this Congregation's *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics* of December 29, 1975. That document stressed the duty of trying to understand the homosexual condition and noted that culpability for homosexual acts should only be judged with prudence. At the same time the Congregation took note of the distinction commonly drawn between the homosexual condition or tendency and individual homosexual actions. These were described as deprived of their essential and indispensable finality, as being "intrinsically disordered," and able in no case to be approved of (cf. n. 8, §4).

In the discussion which followed the publication of the *Declaration*, however, an overly benign interpretation was given to the homosexual condition itself, some going so far as to call it neutral, or even good. Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.

Therefore, special concern and pastoral attention should be directed toward those who have this condition, lest they be led to believe that the living out of this orientation in homosexual activity is a morally acceptable option. It is not.

4. An essential dimension of authentic pastoral care is the identification of causes of confusion regarding the Church's teaching. One is a new exegesis of Sacred Scripture which claims variously that Scripture has nothing to say on the subject of homosexuality, or that it somehow tacitly approves of it, or that all of its moral injunctions are so culture-bound that they are no longer applicable to contemporary life. These views are gravely erroneous and call for particular attention here.

5. It is quite true that the Biblical literature owes to the different epochs in which it was written a good deal of its varied patterns of thought and expression (*Dei Verbum* 12). The Church today addresses the Gospel to a world which differs in many ways from ancient days. But the world in which the New Testament was written was already quite diverse from the situation in which the Sacred

Scriptures of the Hebrew People had been written or compiled, for example.

What should be noticed is that, in the presence of such remarkable diversity, there is nevertheless a clear consistency within the Scriptures themselves on the moral issue of homosexual behavior. The Church's doctrine regarding this issue is thus based, not on isolated phrases for facile theological argument, but on the solid foundation of a constant Biblical testimony. The community of faith today, in unbroken continuity with the Jewish and Christian communities within which the ancient Scriptures were written, continues to be nourished by those same Scriptures and by the Spirit of Truth whose Word they are. It is likewise essential to recognize that the Scriptures are not properly understood when they are interpreted in a way which contradicts the Church's living Tradition. To be correct, the interpretation of Scripture must be in substantial accord with that Tradition.

The Second Vatican Council, in *Dei Verbum* 10, put it this way:

It is clear, therefore, that in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.

In that spirit we wish to outline briefly the Biblical teaching here.

6. Providing a basic plan for understanding this entire discussion of homosexuality is the theology of creation we find in Genesis. God, in his infinite wisdom and love, brings into existence all of reality as a reflection of his goodness. He fashions mankind, male and female, in his own image and likeness. Human beings, therefore, are nothing less than the work of God himself; and in the complementarity of the sexes, they are called to reflect the inner unity of the Creator. They do this in a striking way in their cooperation with him in the transmission of life by a mutual donation of the self to the other.

In Genesis 3, we find that this truth about persons being an image of God has been obscured by original sin. There inevitably follows a loss of awareness of the covenantal character of the union these persons had with God and with each other. The human body retains its "spousal significance" but this is now clouded by sin. Thus, in Genesis 19:1-11, the deterioration due to sin continues in the story of the men of Sodom. There can be no doubt of the moral judgement made there against homosexual relations. In Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, in the course of describing the conditions necessary for belonging to the Chosen People, the author excludes from the People of God those who behave in a homosexual fashion.

Against the background of this exposition of theocratic law, an eschatological perspective is developed by St. Paul when, in I Corinthians 6:9, he proposes the same doctrine and lists those who behave in a homosexual fashion among those who shall not enter the Kingdom of God.

In Romans 1:18-32, still building on the moral traditions of his forebears, but in the new context of the confrontation between Christianity and the pagan society of his day, Paul uses homosexual behavior as an example of the blindness which has overcome humankind. Instead of the original harmony between Creator and creatures, the acute distortion of idolatry has led to all kinds of moral excess. Paul is at a loss to find a clearer example of this disharmony than homosexual relations. Finally, 1 Timothy 1, in full continuity with the Biblical position, singles out those who spread wrong doctrine and in verse 10 explicitly names as sinners those who engage in homosexual acts.

7. The Church, obedient to the Lord who founded her and gave to her the sacramental life, celebrates the divine plan of the loving and live-giving union of men and women in the sacrament of marriage. It is only in the marital relationship that the use of the sexual faculty can be morally good. A person engaging in homosexual behavior therefore acts immorally.

To choose someone of the same-sex for one's sexual activity is to annul the rich symbolism and meaning, not to mention the goals, of the Creator's sexual design. Homosexual activity is not a complementary union, able to transmit life; and so it thwarts the call to a life of that form of self-giving which the Gospel says is the essence of Christian living. This does not mean that homosexual persons are not often generous and giving of themselves; but when they engage in homosexual activity they confirm within themselves a disordered sexual inclination which is essentially self-indulgent.

As in every moral disorder, homosexual activity prevents one's own fulfillment and happiness by acting contrary to the creative wisdom of God. The Church, in rejecting erroneous opinions regarding homosexuality, does not limit but rather defends personal freedom and dignity realistically and authentically understood.

8. Thus, the Church's teaching today is in organic continuity with the Scriptural perspective and with her own constant Tradition. Though today's world is in many ways quite new, the Christian community senses the profound and lasting bonds which join us to those generations who have gone before us, "marked with the sign of faith."

Nevertheless, increasing numbers of people today, even within the Church, are bringing enormous pressure to bear on the Church to accept the homosexual condition as though it were not disordered and to condone homosexual activity. Those within the Church who argue in this fashion often have close ties with those with similar views outside it. These latter groups are guided by a vision opposed to the truth about the human person, which is fully disclosed in the mystery of Christ. They reflect, even if not entirely consciously, a materialistic ideology which denies the transcendent nature of the human person as well as the supernatural vocation of every individual.

The Church's ministers must ensure that homosexual persons in their care will not be misled by this point of view, so profoundly opposed to the teaching of the Church. But the risk is great and there are many who seek to create confusion regarding the Church's

position, and then to use that confusion to their own advantage.

9. The movement within the Church, which takes the form of pressure groups of various names and sizes, attempts to give the impression that it represents all homosexual persons who are Catholics. As a matter of fact, its membership is by and large restricted to those who either ignore the teaching of the Church or seek somehow to undermine it. It brings together under the aegis of Catholicism homosexual persons who have no intention of abandoning their homosexual behavior. One tactic used is to protest that any and all criticism of or reservations about homosexual people, their activity and lifestyle, are simply diverse forms of unjust discrimination.

There is an effort in some countries to manipulate the Church by gaining the often well-intentioned support of her pastors with a view to changing civil-statutes and laws. This is done in order to conform to these pressure groups' concept that homosexuality is at least a completely harmless, if not an entirely good, thing. Even when the practice of homosexuality may seriously threaten the lives and well-being of a large number of people, its advocates remain undeterred and refuse to consider the magnitude of the risks involved.

The Church can never be so callous. It is true that her clear position cannot be revised by pressure from civil legislation or the trend of the moment. But she is really concerned about the many who are not represented by the pro-homosexual movement and about those who may have been tempted to

believe its deceitful propaganda. She is also aware that the view that homosexual activity is equivalent to, or as acceptable as, the sexual expression of conjugal love has a direct impact on society's understanding of the nature and rights of the family and puts them in jeopardy.

10. It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs. It reveals a kind of disregard for others which endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law.

But the proper reaction to crimes committed against homosexual persons should not be to claim that the homosexual condition is not disordered. When such a claim is made and when homosexual activity is consequently condoned, or when civil legislation is introduced to protect behavior to which no one has any conceivable right, neither the Church nor society at large should be surprised when other distorted notions and practices gain ground, and irrational and violent reactions increase.

11. It has been argued that the homosexual orientation in certain cases is not the result of deliberate choice; and so the homosexual person would then have no choice but to behave in a homosexual fashion. Lacking freedom, such a person, even if engaged in homosexual activity, would not be culpable.

Here, the Church's wise moral tradition is necessary since it warns against generaliza-

tions in judging individual cases. In fact, circumstances may exist, or may have existed in the past, which would reduce or remove the culpability of the individual in a given instance; or other circumstances may increase it. What is at all costs to be avoided is the unfounded and demeaning assumption that the sexual behavior of homosexual persons is always and totally compulsive and therefore inculpable. What is essential is that the fundamental liberty which characterizes the human person and gives him his dignity be recognized as belonging to the homosexual person as well. As in every conversion from evil, the abandonment of homosexual activity will require a profound collaboration of the individual with God's liberating grace.

12. What, then, are homosexual persons to do who seek to follow the Lord? Fundamentally, they are called to enact the will of God in their life by joining whatever sufferings and difficulties they experience in virtue of their condition to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross. That Cross, for the believer, is a fruitful sacrifice since from that death come life and redemption. While any call to carry the cross or to understand a Christian's suffering in this way will predictably be met with bitter ridicule by some, it should be remembered that this is the way to eternal life for all who follow Christ.

It is, in effect, none other than the teaching of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians when he says that the Spirit produces in the lives of the faithful "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control" (5:22) and further (v. 24), "You

cannot belong to Christ unless you crucify all self-indulgent passions and desires.”

It is easily misunderstood, however, if it is merely seen as a pointless effort at self-denial. The Cross is a denial of self, but in service to the will of God himself who makes life come from death and empowers those who trust in him to practice virtue in place of vice.

To celebrate the Paschal Mystery, it is necessary to let that Mystery become imprinted in the fabric of daily life. To refuse to sacrifice one’s own will in obedience to the will of the Lord is effectively to prevent salvation. Just as the Cross was central to the expression of God’s redemptive love for us in Jesus, so the conformity of the self-denial of homosexual men and women with the sacrifice of the Lord will constitute for them a source of self-giving which will save them from a way of life which constantly threatens to destroy them.

Christians who are homosexual are called, as all of us are, to a chaste life. As they dedicate their lives to understanding the nature of God’s personal call to them, they will be able to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance more faithfully and receive the Lord’s grace so freely offered there in order to convert their lives more fully to his Way.

13. We recognize, of course, that in great measure the clear and successful communication of the Church’s teaching to all the faithful, and to society at large, depends on the correct instruction and fidelity of her pastoral ministers. The Bishops have the particularly grave responsibility to see to it that their assistants in the ministry, above all

the priests, are rightly informed and personally disposed to bring the teaching of the Church in its integrity to everyone.

The characteristic concern and good will exhibited by many clergy and religious in their pastoral care for homosexual persons is admirable, and, we hope, will not diminish. Such devoted ministers should have the confidence that they are faithfully following the will of the Lord by encouraging the homosexual person to lead a chaste life and by affirming that person’s God-given dignity and worth.

14. With this in mind, this Congregation wishes to ask the Bishops to be especially cautious of any programs which may seek to pressure the Church to change her teaching, even while claiming not to do so. A careful examination of their public statements and the activities they promote reveals a studied ambiguity by which they attempt to mislead the pastors and the faithful. For example, they may present the teaching of the Magisterium, but only as if it were an optional source for the formation of one’s conscience. Its specific authority is not recognized. Some of these groups will use the word “Catholic” to describe either the organization or its intended members, yet they do not defend and promote the teaching of the Magisterium; indeed, they even openly attack it. While their members may claim a desire to conform their lives to the teaching of Jesus, in fact they abandon the teaching of his Church. This contradictory action should not have the support of the Bishops in any way.

15. We encourage the Bishops, then, to provide pastoral care in full accord with the teaching of the Church for homosexual persons of their dioceses. No authentic pastoral program will include organizations in which homosexual persons associate with each other without clearly stating that homosexual activity is immoral. A truly pastoral approach will appreciate the need for homosexual persons to avoid the near occasions of sin.

We would heartily encourage programs where these dangers are avoided. But we wish to make it clear that departure from the Church's teaching, or silence about it, in an effort to provide pastoral care is neither caring nor pastoral. Only what is true can ultimately be pastoral. The neglect of the Church's position prevents homosexual men and women from receiving the care they need and deserve.

An authentic pastoral program will assist homosexual persons at all levels of the spiritual life: through the sacraments, and in particular through the frequent and sincere use of the sacrament of Reconciliation, through prayer, witness, counsel and individual care. In such a way, the entire Christian community can come to recognize its own call to assist its brothers and sisters, without deluding them or isolating them.

16. From this multi-faceted approach there are numerous advantages to be gained, not the least of which is the realization that a homosexual person, as every human being, deeply needs to be nourished at many different levels simultaneously.

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, challenges to growth, but 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 only as a "heterosexual" or a "homosexual" and insists that every person has a fundamental Identity: to be the creature of God, and by grace, his child and heir to eternal life.

17. In bringing this entire matter to the Bishops' attention, this Congregation wishes to support their efforts to assure that the teaching of the Lord and his Church on this important question be communicated fully to all the faithful.

In light of the points made above, they should decide for their own dioceses the extent to which an intervention on their part is indicated. In addition, should they consider it helpful, further coordinated action at the level of their National Bishops' Conference may be envisioned.

In a particular way, we would ask the Bishops to support, with the means at their disposal, the development of appropriate forms of pastoral care for homosexual persons. These would include the assistance of the psychological, sociological and medical sciences, in full accord with the teaching of the Church.

They are encouraged to call on the assistance of all Catholic theologians who, by teaching what the Church teaches, and by deepening

their reflections on the true meaning of human sexuality and Christian marriage with the virtues it engenders, will make an important contribution in this particular area of pastoral care.

The Bishops are asked to exercise special care in the selection of pastoral ministers so that by their own high degree of spiritual and personal maturity and by their fidelity to the Magisterium, they may be of real service to homosexual persons, promoting their health and well-being in the fullest sense. Such ministers will reject theological opinions which dissent from the teaching of the Church and which, therefore, cannot be used as guidelines for pastoral care.

We encourage the Bishops to promote appropriate catechetical programs based on the truth about human sexuality in its relationship to the family as taught by the Church. Such programs should provide a good context within which to deal with the question of homosexuality.

This catechesis would also assist those families of homosexual persons to deal with this problem which affects them so deeply.

All support should be withdrawn from any organizations which seek to undermine the teaching of the Church, which are

During an audience granted to the undersigned Prefect, His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, approved this Letter, adopted in an ordinary session of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and ordered it to be published.

Given at Rome, 1 October 1986.

+Alberto Bovone
Secretary

ambiguous about it, or which neglect it entirely. Such support, or even the semblance of such support, can be gravely misinterpreted. Special attention should be given to the practice of scheduling religious services and to the use of Church buildings by these groups, including the facilities of Catholic schools and colleges. To some, such permission to use Church property may seem only just and charitable; but in reality it is contradictory to the purpose for which these institutions were founded, it is misleading and often scandalous.

In assessing proposed legislation, the Bishops should keep as their uppermost concern the responsibility to defend and promote family life.

18. The Lord Jesus promised, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (Jn. 8:32). Scripture bids us speak the truth in love (cf. Eph. 4:15). The God who is at once truth and love calls the Church to minister to every man, woman and child with the pastoral solicitude of our compassionate Lord. It is in this spirit that we have addressed this Letter to the Bishops of the Church, with the hope that it will be of some help as they care for those whose suffering can only be intensified by error and lightened by truth.

+Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger
Prefect

Excerpt from

Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona humana*, 1975

VIII

At the present time there are those who, basing themselves on observations in the psychological order, have begun to judge indulgently, and even to excuse completely, homosexual relations between certain people. This they do in opposition to the constant teaching of the Magisterium and to the moral sense of the Christian people.

A distinction is drawn, and it seems with some reason, between homosexuals whose tendency comes from a false education, from a lack of normal sexual development, from habit, from bad example, or from other similar causes, and is transitory or at least not incurable; and homosexuals who are definitively such because of some kind of innate instinct or a pathological constitution judged to be incurable.

In regard to this second category of subjects, some people conclude that their tendency is so natural that it justifies in their case homosexual relations within a sincere communion of life and love analogous to marriage, in so far as such homosexuals feel incapable of enduring a solitary life.

In the pastoral field, these homosexuals must certainly be treated with understanding and sustained in the hope of overcoming their personal difficulties and their inability to fit into society. Their culpability will be judged with prudence. But no pastoral method can be employed which would give moral justification to these acts on the grounds that they would be consonant with the condition of such people. For according to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality. In Sacred Scripture they are condemned as a serious depravity and even presented as the sad consequence of rejecting God.* This judgment of Scripture does not of course permit us to conclude that all those who suffer from this anomaly are personally responsible for it, but it does attest to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of.

*Cf. Romans 1:24-27. ... See also what St. Paul says of "*masculorum concubitores*" in I Cor 6:10; I Tim 1:10.

Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care

*United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
2006*

*Due to copyright restrictions, this document is not reprinted here.
(pages 111-128)*

*It can be read and downloaded from the website of the USCCB at
bit.ly/USCCB-MPHI*

Additional Resources

Catholic Church Documents

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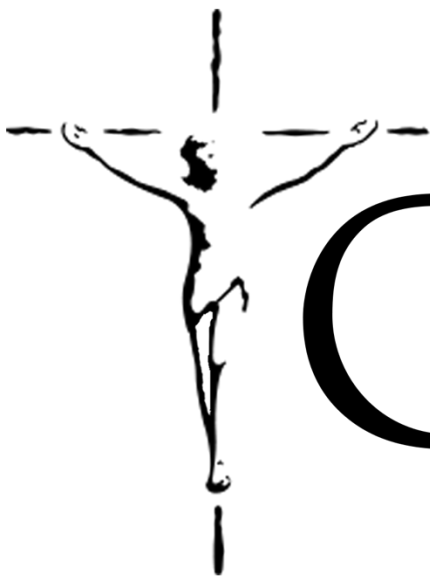
Video Resources

Desire of the Everlasting Hills

A poignant documentary film in which three Catholics relate their personal journey of faith and their experience of same-sex attractions.

Invited to Courageous Love: The Catholic Church and Homosexuality

A five-part catechetical series that explores the stories of Courage and EnCourage members, the teaching of the Catholic Church, the contributions of the social and medical sciences, and authentic pastoral care.



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*“I want to be remembered as being
faithful to a mission.”*

FATHER JOHN F. HARVEY, O.S.F.S.

APRIL 14, 1918 – DECEMBER 27, 2010

FOUNDING DIRECTOR OF COURAGE INTERNATIONAL