

Vatican letter seen as another rejection of gay Catholics

By Teresa A Parsons

She wasn't surprised, but Sister Cheryl Lee responded with a mixture of anger and sadness to the Vatican's new letter on the pastoral care of homosexual persons, which was released last week by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Written by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and approved by Pope John Paul II, the letter reasserts the need for "correct instruction and fidelity" to the Church's official teaching on homosexuality, and calls upon Catholic bishops 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."

For the past six years, Sister Cheryl has ministered to gay and lesbian Catholics as chaplain to the local chapter of Dignity/Integrity, an international organization for homosexual Catholics and Episcopalians.

She is frustrated by yet another blow to a group of Catholics who have so often suffered the sting of rejection in the past. "When people who are gay and lesbian see this text, it's going to hurt them," Sister Cheryl said. "They will want to know what prompted this, and they will feel rejected again by the Church . . . But they are stronger and more confident than they were in the past. They know who they are."

In recent years, the Vatican letter asserts, public debate has confused Catholics with regard to the Church's teaching on homosexuality. Sister Cheryl believes, however, that the document is part of an attempt to exert authority over people who have sought the truth about gay and lesbian people by praying with them and listening to them.

"If they (Church authorities) want to know where the point of truth is, it lives in the hearts of gay and lesbian people," she said. "They don't know what's in those hearts."

Nor do the letter's authors appear to have attempted to find out by talking with any gay or lesbian Catholics, Sister Cheryl pointed out. "I can sense in this that they see sex only as a genital act. They don't see it as a gift," she said. "I just think there's a lot of ignorance here."

Although few psychiatrists still regard homosexuality as a disorder, writers of the letter claim that the Church's moral viewpoint transcends the horizons of science to encompass a more global vision of the physical and spiritual dimensions of the human person. "They term homosexuality as a problem, a phenomenon, a disorder. They haven't put a

face on homosexuality," Sister Cheryl said.

She views the letter as a step backward from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's 1975 document, "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics," which distinguished between homosexual actions, which are considered inherently wrong, and homosexual inclinations, which are not.

That declaration, according to Cardinal Ratzinger's latest letter, has received an "overly benign interpretation."

"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," he wrote.

One whole section of the document deals with the "clear consistency" of scripture, from Genesis to the letters of Paul and Timothy — all of which, it says, supports the Church's traditional teaching on homosexuality.

Sister Cheryl, however, claims that the spirit of the gospels is neglected. "It (the letter) seems to negate the people Jesus spent time with, that they weren't the high church officials, but sinners," she said. "Can't they see that is where Jesus is and was?"

While the letter emphasizes the need for appropriate pastoral care for homosexual Catholics, Sister Cheryl argues that a truly pastoral approach would instead focus on the evils of homophobia.

"It's so contradictory to say 'promote their well-being and health,' but then exclude any means of doing that," she said. "They're also aiming at backing the bishops into a corner . . . I don't see that as pastoral care to the bishops. They're saying that the truth is theirs — that there is no other truth."

The letter cautions the bishops to avoid condoning or appearing to condone groups that advocate changing Church teaching, or that neglect or ignore such teaching. In particular, the letter points out that pastoral leaders can appear to lend credence to such groups by allowing them to use Church facilities and warns against supporting civil legislation that seeks to "protect behavior to which no one has any conceivable right."

Although the letter names no names, Sister Cheryl believes that it almost certainly refers indirectly to Dignity/Integrity. In the words of its international founder, Augustinian Father Patrick X. Nidorf, the organization's goal is "to help the gay Catholic achieve a sense of dignity . . . and to change the Catholic conscience from its Puritanical fear and ignorance



Hundreds of people jammed New York City Hall Park last March to demonstrate in favor of civil rights for homosexuals. A Vatican letter on the pastoral care of homosexual Catholics, released last week, warns bishops and other pastoral workers that they must distance themselves from the "pro-homosexual movement" and its "deceitful propaganda."

to one of true Christ-like love and acceptance"

Another point of separation between Dignity's philosophy and official Church teaching lies in Dignity's recognition of committed relationships between gay and lesbian people.

Likewise, among Dignity/Integrity's stated

purposes is "to assist the Church to understand the inherent dignity of gay Catholics, educating it to support gay civil and human rights as an essential part of a commitment to gospel justice"

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Courier-Crossword

Our monthly crossword puzzle! Give it a try and see how well you do. Answers will be printed in our next issue. Good Luck!

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ACROSS

- November 2.
- French article.
- Pope in Rome.
- She was the devil in "Dam Yankees".
- Disciples of Christ college in Texas, known as Horned Frogs.
- First two letters on the cross.
- Tie score.
- November 11.
- Sergei Ozawa's group. (abbrev.)
- Scottish one.
- State of Cardinal Bernardin.
- 16 oz.
- 6 points on the gridiron.
- Keening cry.
- OT long-haired strong man
- "One -- a time".

DOWN

- November 1.
- Pope from 1878-1903, the XIII.
- Inquisition or Armada.
- Dead -- (abbrev.).
- "the Down Staircase".
- Riga is its capital.
- Adjust a piano or radio.
- Outside of heaven and hell.
- Patroness of church music, Nov. 22.
- Smash movie of 1983.
- He, she or it, in Paris.
- Possess. *
- Popular sandwich.
- US prosecuting lawyer.

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