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## Ministry

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Lifelong Learning." Also, according to a 1986 letter to bishops from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "The particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin," although it must be seen as "an objective disorder."

- Homosexuals are due the same basic rights as any other people. The CDF's 1986 letter called it "deplorable" that they have been objects of malice in speech or action.

- Gay and lesbian Catholics should have active roles in the Christian community, according to the U.S. bishops' 1976 document "To Live in Christ Jesus."

- The U.S. bishops also have urged a "special degree of pastoral understanding and care" for homosexuals and, in "Human Sexuality," called on people to confront their own fears about homosexuality. Next year, the bishops' Secretariat on Family, Laity, Women and Youth is expected to issue a statement currently titled "Always Our Children" as a pastoral message for parents who have learned that their children are homosexual, according to Richard McCord, chief staff person for the secretariat.

- "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," as the CDF stated in its 1986 letter.

These five teachings form the basis for the new diocesan-based ministry.

"We base our ministry in part on a principle that homosexuality is something one is, not something one does," said Casey Lopata, who holds a master of divinity from St. Bernard's Institute.

The couple will speak at a March 7-9 national dialogue in Pittsburgh sponsored by the controversial 20-year-old New Ways Ministry, whose founders are under investigation by the Vatican. On a separate panel at the dialogue, Bishop Clark and two other Catholic bishops will address "Pastoral Care of Lesbian/Gay People." Among other speakers will be Father James Schexnayder, president of the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian & Gay



Ministries executive committee.

According to Father Schexnayder, at least 20 ministries to gays and lesbians are operating in U.S. dioceses; Richmond, Va., has the oldest. These diocesan initiatives run the gamut from multi-faceted ministries to just a weekly or monthly liturgy for gays and lesbians.

A few operate a chapter of the organization Courage as their ministries or, as in the diocese of Orange, Calif., as one of several ministries, Father Schexnayder said.

Courage is a spiritual support group designed to help Catholics live in accordance with the church's pastoral teaching on homosexuality. The organization and its approach have received Vatican approval.

But, Father Schexnayder, said, "My reading of materials from Courage and hearing people speak about it is it has a different point of view than church documents." Noting that the organization encourages homosexuals to change their orientation, he said, "(I) doesn't see homosexuality as a stable orientation, but tends to see it as changeable."

On the other hand, Father John Harvey, OSFS, founder of Courage and author of the new book, *The Truth about Homosexuality*, criticized ministries in Father Schexnayder's association for making little or no mention of the virtue of chastity. And while Courage "encourages people to make the effort" to reverse their sexuality, it is not a requirement, Father Harvey said. He estimated Courage chapters exist in 26 U.S. and Canadian dioceses.

Courage maintains that homosexuality "is not the work of God - nor is it usually a person's choice: It is an aspect of an arrested sexual development resulting from

no one simple factor."

The Diocese of Rochester does not have a Courage chapter, Casey Lopata pointed out.

But he said that if a homosexual Catholic seeks to be celibate, the Rochester ministry seeks to support that decision. And if a homosexual Catholic does not endorse celibacy, he said, "We deal with that person the same way the church deals with somebody who is divorced or separated, a person who's heterosexual and struggling with perhaps living together with somebody outside of marriage, or somebody struggling with artificial birth control."

The Lopatas said they doubt the effectiveness of conversion therapies. They cited an American Psychological Association statement that "many scientists share the view that sexual orientation is shaped for most people at an early age through complex interactions of biological, psychological and social factors ... (and) scientific evidence does not show that conversion therapy works and that it can do more harm than good."

In his 1996 compilation of research, *Queer Science*, however, scientist/author Simon Le Vay noted that, "Within the psychoanalytic profession, there still appears to be a widespread belief that some homosexual individuals can be converted ..."

While consensus on homosexuality appears unlikely, homosexual individuals such as Sheila Sloan welcomed the diocesan reliance on the Catholic Gay and Lesbian Family Ministry as "wonderful news."

The ministry team conducted a three-part workshop at Corpus Christi Church following a November baptism at the church for a child Sloan and partner, Nancy Hackett, adopted. Although their reception was warm, Sloan said some members of the congregation seemed not to know what to tell their children about "two moms" being up at the altar.

Corpus Christi also offers its own wide-ranging ministry for gays and lesbians, and its family minister's view of the family has been described in a parish newsletter as including gay or lesbian couples. "Forever committed" couples, meanwhile, are invited to renew their vows along with hetero-

sexual couples at a Mass every year.

Father Jim Callan, parish administrator, explained that he sees homosexual people as facing six choices: suicide, which many commit; marriage and "pretending you are heterosexual"; going to the seminary or convent to "hide";

Celibacy, "which the church teaches and I also teach because it is a gift"; promiscuity, "which nobody would ever agree with"; and gay unions or permanent commitments.

"I am in favor of the church allowing and promoting same-sex union because of the need to foster fidelity in the gay community," Father Callan asserted. "... Fidelity is at the heart of the Gospel. The church should be promoting it and teaching people how to love, to be faithful and committed."

Father Kennedy, meanwhile, acknowledged he is convening a group to study the church response to same-sex unions, but cautioned that the group's task is still being defined.

"In the end we are not going to be able to do much, I can assure you and your readers," Father Kennedy said, "because that's where we (the church) are."

He called the Oct. 26 day of reflection "much more important" as far as the ministry is concerned.

"It is more directly related to what is in the real world," Father Kennedy said. "Same-sex unions, I have to say, are not in the real world. It's too complex an issue and we have got to be very very careful to sort out what pertains to human and civil rights of all persons, and what we can legally do in terms of what we believe in our faith tradition."

Speaking for the diocese, Father John Mulligan, vicar general and moderator of the curia, said that, to his knowledge, no blessing of a same-sex union has been conducted in the diocese. Since such blessings would be contrary to church teaching, anyone conducting them would be instructed to stop, Father Mulligan said.

He said the diocese looks forward to the ministry's recommendations on gay and lesbian issues, especially on making the church more welcoming.

"I am delighted that we've gotten to this point," he said.

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