

Questions invite thought on homosexuality

Most readers of the *Catholic Courier* know by now that on Saturday afternoon, March 1, I will be presiding at a Eucharistic Liturgy at Sacred Heart Cathedral to which we have invited gay and lesbian Catholics, their families and friends, and others who may be interested in attending.

I am very pleased to do so because I am convinced that this celebration will offer encouragement — and perhaps some healing — both to many who participate and to others who simply hear about the gathering.

This initiative emerges, in part, from a collaborative relationship with the Catholic Gay and Lesbian Family Ministry. We began a relationship with this ministry some time ago and formalized it last September. We have several hopes for the ministry, including: (1) to reach out to and be of any assistance we can to gay and lesbian persons, and their families, who feel alienated from or in any way hurt by the church; (2) to give evidence of our conviction that gay and lesbian persons should not suffer prejudice against their basic human rights — that they have a right to respect, friendship and justice; (3) to heed God's call to the church to minister to every man, woman and child with the pastoral solicitude of our compassionate Lord; and (4) to offer opportunities for people to learn more about the church's teaching about homosexuality.

The announcement of the event sparked a good deal of conversation. I spent much time after the announcement talking about it with reporters from local radio and television outlets who, quite understandably, were interested in knowing more about the celebration. Since then I have received many letters and have engaged in a good number of conversations about the event in such disparate places as the sacristy of Sacred Heart Cathedral, the waiting room in my doctor's office, the locker room at the YMCA, and the pop section at Wegmans.

It may or may not surprise you to learn that the majority of comments made by

along
the way



By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

people who wrote or spoke to me were very positive. Some were from gay and lesbian persons who have great faith and love the church, but who do not feel welcome among us. Others are from parents, grandparents and friends of gay and lesbian people, who have worried that people they love very dearly do not have a place in the church. Most have come from people who have a deep sense that such events give witness to our conviction that the living love of Christ embraces us all.

Clearly, there are those within our community who have reservations and questions about this liturgy. I think I can fairly summarize their concerns, as I understand them, in two statements:

(1) Celebrating this liturgy is a mistake because doing so gives implicit approval to activity that is immoral, and (2) But since you have decided to preside and preach at this liturgy, it is your obligation to remind those present in no uncertain terms of the immorality of gay and lesbian genital sexual activity.

Neither space nor time allows for a full, detailed response to these two observations. But I do wish to respect both the questions and those who pose them by raising some questions of my own that, I hope, both touch on both concerns and invite all readers to further thought on this question:

• Do you accept the distinction church teaching makes between a homosexual orientation (or tendency) and homosexual activity? If you do, how would awareness of that distinction influence the assumptions

you might make about the moral state of those who will gather at the cathedral on Saturday? Would you make the same assumptions about the moral condition of heterosexual persons in the congregation as you would about the homosexual persons present? Why or why not?

• The Catechism of the Catholic Church contains the statement that homosexual persons do not choose their homosexual condition. It is my strong impression that this is news for many people. Are you among them? If you are, will this new information challenge your thinking or influence any of your attitudes? Which? And in what ways?

• Do you find helpful the statement by the U.S. bishops that "the human person, made in the image and likeness of God, can hardly be adequately described by reductionist reference to his or her sexual orientation"? Imagine that you asked a friend to offer a descriptive introduction of you to another person, and your friend said, "I'd like you to meet my friend Mary (or John). She/he is heterosexual." Would you be happy with that introduction? If not, what other dimensions or aspects of your person would you think should be mentioned?

• Have you ever worked or otherwise associated with a person you liked and admired very much only to discover after some time that the person was gay or lesbian? What was your reaction? Do you know any gay or lesbian Catholics well enough to ask what it is like for them to be gay or lesbian and Catholic? If not, would you be interested in participating in such a conversation?

If I go on much longer with this, the editor will scold me. Let me conclude by thanking you for your kindness in reading these words and for your willingness to think about the questions I have placed before you. I hope you will agree that it is good for us to speak together about such things. I believe it is for the life and good health of our church that we do.

Peace to all.

Catholic
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JESUS' PRAYER FOR HIS PRIESTS

O Jesus, by Thy most loving Heart, implore Thee to inflame with zeal for Thy love and glory all the priests of the world, all missionaries and those whose office it is to preach Thy word, that on fire with holy zeal, they may snatch souls from the devil and lead them into the shelter of Thy Heart, where for ever they may glorify Thee.

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Prayer Suggestions: Mass, Rosary, Fasting, Day Offering, Eucharistic Adoration, Offering Sufferings, Divine Mercy Chaplet

March, 1997

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