

Don't practice selective condemnation

We've been through another huge media week. The Starr report is out now and radio talk shows, newspaper articles, television reports, the Internet are all telling us how involved we are in the story and how we should be thinking about it. My own sister is embroiled in reading it on the Net and has expressed amazement that even though it is a "legal" document, it's written at a level that makes it easy for anybody to understand!

This weekend will provide local media with yet another "exciting" event to foment about — the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries will have its annual meeting in Rochester. Last year this association met in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and next year it will meet in the Archdiocese of Chicago. I suppose in these bigger cities there is more going on so the media doesn't have time to focus on what is probably a rather bland story there. As far as I can tell, the "story" here is that a group of church ministers will come together to learn more about the problems of those they try to serve, and more about methods of ministry that may help them reach out to gay and lesbian Catholics more effectively.

I keep trying to understand why that is so troubling to some, and so "exciting" that it provokes such enormous media interest.

Much of the media attention arises be-



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By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

cause there is a small but vocal clique of righteous church members who assume that gay and lesbian Catholics have no need for, or perhaps have no right to, Christian ministry from parish and diocesan staffs. They even denounce the bishops who have scheduled Masses welcoming gay and lesbian Catholics to our parish communities. This is confusing to me because I assume that we all have needs for, and rights to, ministry. We all have specific needs, and even the specific needs we have vary at different times of our lives.

At St. Bernard's Institute where I work, our job is to help people prepare for ministry in the Catholic Church. In order to do this right we focus all the time on specific kinds of needs that specific people have. We have courses and programs directed at all kinds of pastoral needs. To name just a few, our students learn about the special spiritual

needs of teens (we have a whole program for those preparing to be certified as youth ministers), we have a course that considers the differences in the spiritual needs that men and women have. There is another course on ministering to those who have experienced the death of a loved one.

We operate on the well-established principle that not all people's needs for ministry are exactly the same. Thus, in all our courses we try to help our students preparing for church ministry to understand the specific spiritual and pastoral needs of the kinds of people they will be meeting. The elderly do not have the same needs as youth; migrant workers have unique spiritual and personal struggles; Spanish-speaking immigrants have pastoral needs different from those of Anglo-American Catholics.

I guess the clique of our fellow Catholics so disturbed by the NACDLGM conference must assume that these other kinds of ministry preparation gatherings are okay. We hold these other sessions all the time, but there is no media blitz surrounding these sorts of life issues. There are no slanderous, misleading fliers denouncing these kinds of ministries plastered on our cars as we attend Mass, as there have been about this weekend's conference. It must be that the clique of Catholics so "worried" about ministering to gay and lesbians assumes that there is

a problem because gay and lesbian Catholics may also be "sinners."

I can only suppose that this group assumes that teenagers, for example, ARE NOT sinning. They must also assume that men and women (heterosexual, of course) ARE NOT sinning, either, because we address the specific pastoral needs of men and women all the time without enduring protests and slanderous leaflets. The assumption must be that migrant workers aren't sinners, either, because we had a great conference a few months ago about ministry to migrants farmworkers, and there were no protests or fliers about that. Finally, the elderly must be presumed to be without any tendency to sin, too, as must be those who experience loss and bereavement, and those who are sick and dying. No leaflets or media there. It's just not right to talk about ministering to gays and lesbians, I guess.

As a member of the church that spent this past weekend reading Luke's 15th chapter, I have grave concerns about a clique that spreads hatred and misunderstanding about ministries on behalf of gay and lesbian Catholics. I have none whatever about this conference that will be taking place in our city — in fact, I think our Christianity would be a sham without it.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.



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