

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

A social justice newsletter of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Third Order St. Francis

*Sr. Cecilia Marie Morton, Sr. Donna Wilhelm, Sr. Dorothy Pagosa, Jennifer Dillon,
Sr. Marjorie White, Maxine Smith, Sr. Rose Grabowski, Sr. Shannon Fox
—Social Justice Committee*



Special Interest Articles:

- Theme of issue ... Sister Donna
- A Visit to LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland



Individual Highlights:

- LGBT Community Centers 2
- What's an Ally? 2
- People of God Who are Gay or Lesbian 3
- "Out of Silence God Has Called Me" 3
- Resources 6
- Review of Father James Martin's Book: "Building a Bridge" 7

Where are we? How did we get Here?

by Sister Donna Wilhelm

I'm sitting here feeling the pressure of the impending deadline for this newsletter and I am wondering, "What have I gotten myself in to?"

During a recent Social Justice Committee Zoom meeting the issue of homosexuality came up. There was some conversation about whether or not to dedicate an issue of *We Commit Ourselves* to the topic. I said, rather spontaneously, "I'll do that."

I'm no expert, but I do believe the issue of our relationship to the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) community

is a very relevant one, given our commitment to engage and support those persons in our society who are marginalized.

So now what?

Most of us are familiar with the acronym LGBT. By the way, it's growing! Now we often see LGBTQ+. What's that about? Basically, the growing list of letters is an attempt by a community in our society to self-identify, to name themselves rather than be named by others. Also, LGBTQ+ folks do not identify themselves as "homosexuals." Some say that's an outdated term.

You'll find a variety of items in this issue: some information by way of excerpts from a series by Fr. Joe Fortuna, who at the time of their writing was pastor of a Cleveland parish and a theology instructor at the diocesan seminary; some resources; and some suggestions for further participation in a community that very few of us know much about.

My hope is that this issue of our newsletter will be informative and challenging, as well as provide the impetus for us to talk about this topic. ■

"As FRANCISCANS centered on the revelation of the emerging COSMIC Christ, contemplating and celebrating this DIVINE action in our lives, [one of] our deepest desires [is] to:

SPEAK to the Church and to the world from our common understanding that there be no outcasts in our experience of life on this earth."

— Deepest Desires

A Visit to the LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland

by Sister Donna Wilhelm, SSJ-TOSF

Cleveland's LGBT Community Center has been around since 1975. The brochure I received when I visited states:

Our Mission – to enrich the lives of the diverse LGBT community through advocacy, support, education, and celebration.

Our Vision – The LGBT community is embraced and celebrated as an integral part of a thriving Northeast Ohio region.

Those two statements set the scene for a Center that seems full of life and offers a variety of programs.

There are groups for Sage – LGBT Seniors, for Youth and Young Adults, for folks with disabilities, Veterans, a Family Drop-in night quarterly, and a TransFamily

Continued on p. 2

A Visit to the LGBT Community Center... continued

group that provides support for transgender individuals and allies. (Note: See below for more info on “allies”).

The Center has trainings, internships, and volunteer opportunities. And there are Health and Wellness offerings like Tai Chi and Reiki, and Lake Effect Free Health Clinic, donation-based services that include massage, herbal medicine, and others.

My guide was Erick. He had been at the Center as a Social Work intern and had been hired full-time as the program director. He told me that they sponsor a “drop-in night” for youth (ages 14-24) three times a week.

As I concluded my visit, I asked Erick what he thought was most important to convey to our sisters and associates. He responded by saying, “There are many harmful untruths about LGBT individuals, like, people can choose to be LGBT and can be ‘cured’ of it.” He also told me to tell you “LGBT people are people. They aren’t particularly different from others in our communities.” And, finally, he emphasized that “Attitudes change when people realize there is an LGBT person in the family.” We share a common humanity created in God’s image.

Feel free to visit the Cleveland Center or one in your area. You will be welcomed warmly. ■

LGBT Community Centers in our Three Major Areas

- **Stevens Point, WI:**

Gender and Sexuality Resource Center:

<https://www.uwsp.edu/dca/LGBT/Pages/default.aspx>

LGBT of Stevens Point and Surrounding Areas

<https://www.facebook.com/LgbtOfPortageCounty/>

Central Wisconsin Pride Celebration: Weekend of June 8, 2018

http://www.mkelgbthist.org/organiz/act_pol/central-wis-pride.htm

- **Chicago, IL:**

Center on Halsted: <http://www.centeronhalsted.org/>

Pride activities: Weekend of June 22, 2018

- **Cleveland, OH:**

LGBT Community Center Greater Cleveland: <http://m.lgbtcleveland.org/index.html>

Pride in the CLE: 1st Weekend in June: <http://lgbtcleveland.org/pride-in-the-cle.html>



Rainbow Flag:
A universal symbol of
LGBT community.

What’s an Ally? *by Kasey Aitken, LSW*

(A Social Work intern at Crossroads Hospice in a presentation to Psycho-social staff)

An “ally” is a term used to describe someone who is an advocate and supportive of LGBT people, or any marginalized group. This includes someone who takes steps toward eliminating prejudice and discrimination in our society.

Every one of God’s children deserves to be treated with dignity, respect and

equality. Being an ally is more than being sympathetic towards those who experience discrimination; it means being willing to act with and for others in pursuit of ending oppression and creating equality.

What are some things you can do to be an ally?

1. Educate yourself about different identities

and experiences.

2. Look inward to challenge prejudices.

3. Take action to create interpersonal, societal and institutional change.

4. A symbol, like a rainbow flag pin can signal your presence as an ally.

5. Be courageous! If you witness discrimination, speak up. ■

People of God Who are Gay or Lesbian: A Catholic Pastoral Response

People of God Who are Gay or Lesbian: A Catholic Response is a series of bulletin articles written in 1997 by Fr. Joe Fortuna of the Diocese of Cleveland. At the time they were written, Fr. Joe was pastor of Ascension Parish and a theology instructor at the diocesan seminary. There are six articles in the series and, as Fr. Joe noted when giving permission for us to reprint portions, some of the information is “outdated,” but still provides a useful pastoral perspective. Below are excerpts from his articles.

Fr. Joe writes:

Introduction

Our popular American culture has very recently given renewed attention to the fact that some of us are gay or lesbian human beings. Some of this attention has attempted to be sensitive and honest. Some has been derisive and mean. Some has attempted to poke fun. Almost none of it has seriously engaged any faith concerns.

I do not ask you to accept at face value these assertions, but to think for a moment about what you have heard or seen in the past few months. Ellen has “come out” to the world, openly admitting that she is lesbian. Although doing so in the context of a sitcom, her gesture was serious and risky. Not long ago The Plain Dealer did a serious article on Robbie, the student at St.

Ignatius High School (in Cleveland, OH) who committed suicide at least partly because of his {LGBTQ} identity.

Jay Leno, whose humor and politics often seem to be “liberal” (whatever this may mean anymore), has often engaged in humor that can be described as “gay bashing.” Roseanne spoofed the Ellen sitcom in her last show of the season by having her whole family “come out” as if they were gay or lesbian.

A particularly disturbing development among our youth culture is that the word “gay” is now being used as a term of derision to signify something or someone who in a former jargon was “not cool,” “nerdy,” or otherwise stigmatized by the “in” group.

These are just a few examples of the preoccupation and talk about gay or lesbian

members of our population. On the one hand, the fact that these expressions are happening at all can be an indication of healthy awareness. On the other, the manner in which these expressions occur can make one suspicious about the motives, awareness and attitudes of those who make them.

These suspicions are reasonable enough to take another look at our approach to people who are gay or lesbian, but there are two other reasons as well. The first is that there is no reason to believe that the percentage of people who are gay or lesbian, is any different in the church than elsewhere in society. Research shows that the percentages of Catholics who divorce or who have abortions or use birth control is about the same percentage among those who are not Catholic. In other words, I think that with regard

Continued on p. 4



Fr. Joe Fortuna

Out of Silence God Has Called Me

In 2002 Janet Rozanno, RSM, a Sister of Mercy who lives in California, was asked to give a presentation at the Fifth Annual New Ways Ministry gathering held in Louisville, KY. These are a few of her comments from a 2008 publication of the same title.

My own journey:

“I first came to know and accept my lesbian identity when I was in my 40s and a member of my community’s regional

Leadership team. The event that precipitated this turning point in my life was having another community member come to speak to our team about her lesbian identity and her desire to participate in a retreat for gay and lesbian religious. There followed for me an intense and frightening several months when I suddenly knew that I, too, was lesbian. For years I had tiptoed around this reality, too afraid to name or explore it. I’d commented on it

Continued on p. 5



Sister Janet Rozanno, RSM

Fr. Joe's Bulletin Articles... continued from p. 3

“Stemming from our Franciscan values and the fact that all life is interconnected, members, vowed and non-vowed, are encouraged to be engaged in ministry with those living on the margins of society and struggling to live with dignity.”

SSJ-TOSF Congregational
Commitments
26th General Chapter

to {LGBT issues} as well as other social issues, the Catholic population reflects the wider American population.

The second reason is that since some members of the People of God are gay or lesbian, then those who are not must regard them with the same mind and heart of Christ with which they would regard the heterosexual members. In addition, anyone who is a member of the Body of Christ brings to that Body both the need to be nurtured and supported by the Body and the right and responsibility to serve the mission of the Body.

What's it like to be gay or lesbian in our culture and our church

.....There are some things that seem to be common to the experience of gay or lesbian people, not because they are all the same, but because the dominant culture in which we live presumes that {all} people are hetero-sexual {and that is “normal”}....This creates problems for homosexuals that others do not face.

For example, all human beings who grow to adulthood face a difficult period of discovering their sexual identity. They get in touch

with their bodies, with feelings and needs that were not noticed or important before, with desires for the relationship and intimacy which are necessary for healthy human living. For example, all human beings who grow to adulthood face a difficult period of discovering their sexual identity.

Discovering one's sexual identity is difficult {for all of us}. There is a certain amount of discomfort and embarrassment, a great deal of insecurity and sometimes awkwardness, along with anticipation and excitement. It is very important during this time to have healthy role models and conversation partners.

But difficult as this is for someone who is heterosexual, it is far more difficult for people who discover they are gay or lesbian. They begin to discover that their desires and attractions are not like those of most other people. Everything to which their culture says they should be attracted, every socially acceptable behavior and situation, the majority of celebrity role models, situation comedies, movies, and so forth—trumpet the norm of being heterosexual.....

People discovering they are gay or lesbian can be horrified, frightened and

confused. They can feel isolated and alone. Their fears and confusion can lead them to repress their true sexual identity or to act out in ways that are not healthy. They can feel marginalized and invisible in our culture because our culture has a decided preference that they be marginalized or invisible.

A Catholic pastoral response to gay and lesbian people must consider carefully the manner in which Jesus sought and cared for those whom the dominant society marginalized and cast out. We must ponder that Jesus was never condescending, nor did he permit those who were outcast to turn away from the truth of their existence. In every instance he helped them to see and live their existence in light of the Reign of God.

He challenged them to accept God's commands at the same time that he challenged those in the dominant society to confront their own prejudices and ungodly attitudes. He invited all, both the marginalized and the socially accepted, to find a way to live and love each other that is characteristic of the Reign of God. ■

This concludes the summary of Fr. Fortuna's first two bulletin articles. They may be viewed and read in their entirety at <http://www.dioceseofcleveland.org/gayandlesbianfamilyministry/GLArticles-Fortuna-revised.pdf>

The other four articles, subjects listed below, are there as well:

- What does science say?
- What does the Church say?
- How do I respond if someone tells me they are part of the LGBTQ+ community?
- What is the role of gay and lesbian people in the Body of Christ?

Out of Silence God Has Called Me ... continued from p. 3

in my journal but never dreamed of mentioning it to another person.”

Sister Janet continues to describe her growing contact with the gay/lesbian Catholic community, her prayer and discernment with her leadership team about how she might move forward, her “coming out” to a number of friends, sisters, and the formation of an institute-wide group of Mercy Sisters who are lesbian for networking and support.

Janet then lists four “learnings” from the years of experience since her new awareness. She first claims that “there is no right way to be a lesbian religious. Gay and lesbian people are as varied as any other group...” “...They cannot be reduced to the limited stereotypes depicted in the media.” Integration and balance are key elements, as is “The need for ongoing discernment in prayer and dialogue...” and a group of supportive friends and sisters.

Among the attitudes that are essential to a growing healthy integration of one’s sexuality, she says, is “A sense of our own goodness as lesbian religious; joy in who we are. ... An ability to communicate about our identity in open and appropriate ways ... and enough personal strength not to be devastated by the homophobia that exists in the Church and society...” among others.

“I would venture to say,” Rozanno continues, “we are perhaps the most silent and hidden subgroup in the gay and lesbian Catholic community. For many women religious this creates the illusion that there really aren’t any, or only a few, ...so “this is not an important issue among us.”

Janet offers that she also believes that since sexuality (not just sexual orientation)

is seldom spoken of among women religious, this may give the impression that we are asexual, that we don’t have sexual feelings, concerns or challenges in our lives. Finally she says, “Silence within our communities only allows hurtful stereotypes and misconceptions to go unchallenged, uncorrected, ironically among one of the best educated groups of women in our society.”

What are some of these stereotypes? Rozanno mentions a few:

- Lesbians are always sexually active.
- Since lesbian sisters always have sex on their minds, they are not suited for religious life.
- Women who are friends with lesbians are probably lesbian themselves.
- If lesbian sisters are “out” people will think all of us are lesbian.

Rozanno concludes, “I think this unfortunate situation of fearful and unhealthy silence contributes to a subtle, often unconscious, oppression of lesbian women in our communities....This is true, she says, even though the majority sincerely want to be accepting and supportive.

The challenge often is not knowing how to do this. “We want lesbian sisters to feel free to be who they are, but we hope they won’t say much about who they are.” Fr. Brian Massingale called this, in his presentation to the New Ways Ministry Conference in 2017, the “open closet” that exists in the Church.

So what is the way forward?

Continued on p. 6

Out of Silence God Has Called Me

A Lesbian Religious Tells Her Story



What do the letters mean?

LGBT:

- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
- Sometimes LGBTQ (Queer, or Questioning)
- Sometimes LGBTQA (Asexual)



Out of Silence God Has Called Me ... continued from p. 5

Again, so what is the way forward?

Sister Janet suggests four small steps:

- We need to begin where we are, with our present fears, questions and reticence. A process she suggests that needs to occur both within us as individuals and among us in group settings. "God may be calling us to revisit the aspects of sexuality we have too often ignored: human sexuality, healthy celibacy, intimacy, friendship, and sexual orientation."
- Sharing in small groups some of our own struggles to live celibacy in life-giving ways," Janet concludes, "might provide a natural place to talk about our own experience and to notice both what is universal and what is unique in each of our stories." Such conversation could be potentially freeing for our lesbian members for some similar sharing.
- Rozanno shares the conviction that we are called to a prophetic vision, to lament and to weep with the marginal-

ized; to stand in "loyal opposition" for the realization of God's reign. "We are called to acknowledge the discrepancy between our community ideals of sisterhood, respect, and loving acceptance on the one hand, and the closeted and fearful situation of our lesbian women on the other."

- And concluding, she offers a challenge. "I think the point of intersection in all of these things is at the place where, in the spirit of Jesus, we are called to accept differences, nurture inclusiveness, welcome the stranger and celebrate the gifts of diversity. Wherever we take steps to break the barriers of fear, exclusion, and oppression, we unleash freedom and energy for love and for God's work in the world." ■

Out of Silence God Has Called Me: A Lesbian Religious Tells Her Story is available from New Ways Ministry at www.NewWaysMinistry.org



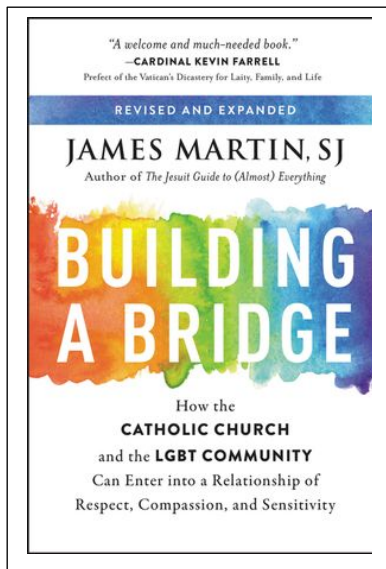
This symbol denotes a safe area for LGBT people, where they will not be harassed or harmed, but accepted.



Another symbol for the LGBT Community

Some Resources for Exploring LGBTQ Issues

1. **LETTER TO THE BISHOPS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THE PASTORAL CARE OF HOMOSEXUAL PERSONS:** http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual_persons_en.html
2. Always Our Children: **A PASTORAL MESSAGE TO PARENTS OF HOMOSEXUAL CHILDREN AND SUGGESTIONS FOR PASTORAL MINISTERS:** [HTTP://WWW.USCCB.ORG/ISSUES-AND-ACTION/HUMAN-LIFE-AND-DIGNITY/HOMOSEXUALITY/ALWAYS-OUR-CHILDREN.CFM](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/homosexuality/always-our-children.cfm)
3. A note on the teaching of the Catholic Church concerning homosexuality
Cardinal Basil Hume <http://www.dioceseofcleveland.org/gayandlesbianfamilyministry/resources.htm>
4. **People of God Who are Gay or Lesbian: A Catholic Pastoral Response**
(by Fr. Joe Fortuna) <http://www.dioceseofcleveland.org/gayandlesbianfamilyministry/resources.htm>
5. *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity* by James Martin, SJ, Harper One, 2018.
6. *The Church and the Homosexual* by John McNeil, Beacon Press, Fourth Edition, 1998.
7. New Ways Ministry: <http://www.usccb.org/news/2010/10-028.cfm> (Aside from *Bondings*: a blog and newspaper, New Ways also has a newsletter for vowed women called *Womenjourney Weavings* (Interested sisters can contact New Ways Ministry to begin receiving it.) New Ways also sponsors a retreat each year for Lesbian sisters.
8. **USCCB PRESIDENT CLARIFIES STATUS OF NEW WAYS MINISTRY:** [HTTP://WWW.USCCB.ORG/NEWS/2010/10-028.CFM](http://www.usccb.org/news/2010/10-028.cfm)
Dignity USA: DignityUSA works for respect and justice for people of all sexual orientations, genders, and gender identities — especially gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons — in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy, and support. <https://www.dignityusa.org/>



"A welcome and much-needed book."
—CARDINAL KEVIN FARRELL
Prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life

REVISED AND EXPANDED

JAMES MARTIN, SJ

Author of *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*

BUILDING A BRIDGE

How the
CATHOLIC CHURCH
and the **LGBT COMMUNITY**
Can Enter into a Relationship of
Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity

Building a Bridge: *How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter a Relationship of Respect, Compassion and Sensitivity*

— by Fr. James Martin, S.J.

Review

by Sister Shannon Fox

Fr. James Martin, a Jesuit priest and editor-at-large of *America Magazine*, has recently been in the news. Fr. Martin is the author of *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community can enter a relationship of Respect, Compassion and Sensitivity*.

The response by some groups and Church officials has included protests and demands that he be disinvited as a speaker.

What drove Fr. Martin to write the book was the response, or lack thereof, of Catholic leaders in the aftermath of the 2016

Pulse Massacre in Orlando Florida. He was dismayed at the lack of acknowledgment of the LGBT community in the wake of the massacre.

He states in the opening chapter, "The fact that only a few Catholic bishops acknowledge the LGBT community or even use the word *gay* at such a time showed that the LGBT community is still invisible in many quarters of the Church. Even in tragedy, its members are invisible."

Fr. Martin encourages the two communities to stay in conversation and learn from each other. He describes a two way bridge whereby the Church can be pastoral

and supportive of LGBT Catholics. The other part of the bridge is how LGBT Catholics can begin to rebuild a respectful relationship with the Church, including the hierarchy.

I found *Building a Bridge* to be fair and balanced. It presented a deep understanding of Church teachings and also of the challenge within the LGBT community to be both Catholic and LGBT. I appreciate his hopefulness.

He believes that with good, honest communication and by building relationships, Church protesters and the LGBT community may find common ground. ■



Some further insights into Building Bridges by James Martin, S.J.

In an interview with Fr. Martin for *ImagineOne*, a twice yearly publication of the Congregation of St. Joseph, he offers these key elements for civil discourse:

1. Be willing to give people the benefit of the doubt, from the beginning;
2. Be willing to listen, to learn, and be open to finding out something different;
3. Be willing to be charitable;
4. Be willing to be corrected;
5. Be willing to be surprised or confused. (*Often our first reaction is to attack it or say it can't be true.*)

And in a recent post on Fr. Martin's Facebook page he says, "It's imperative for people to accept everyone as a beloved child of God!

This is the way God made them. The people themselves are a gift to us. Particularly for young people, it's essential that parents and grandparents and families accept them.

The process of coming out or being open about your identity is extremely painful. I know people whose lives have really been destroyed by parents who have not been accepting.

Yet this is what God asks us to do: to love one another. That's the most basic of commandments."

You can read the entire interview at <http://csjoseph.org/flipbook/mobile/index.html#p=6>



Symbols

A symbol is a person or a concept that represents, stands for, or suggests another idea, visual image, belief, action, or material entity.

Symbols take the form of words, sounds, gestures, ideas, or visual images and are used to convey other ideas and beliefs. For example, a red octagon may be a symbol for “STOP.” On a map, a blue line might represent a river. Numerals are symbols for numbers.

— *Wikipedia*

“Stemming from our Franciscan values and the fact that all life is interconnected, members, vowed and non-vowed, are encouraged to be engaged in ministry with those living on the margins of society and struggling to live with dignity.”

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments
26th General Chapter



Lambda: The symbol was originally chosen by the Gay Activists Alliance of New York in 1970.

The lambda soon became a quick way for the members of the gay community to identify with each other.



This symbol, the pink triangle, was first used by Nazis in WW II for LGBT concentration camp prisoners.



REMEMBER...

We welcome your submissions in the form of

- “Sightings”
- Brief write-ups of your activities, suggestions for workshops, books, articles, films, resources, etc.

Note: The **next issue** of *We Commit Ourselves* will be published in **August**.

Please send any items for inclusion in this next issue to **Sister Rose Grabowski** no later than **Friday, July 20th**.

~ *Your Social Justice Committee*