

# THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER



## MINISTERING TO THOSE WITH SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

PREPARED BY THE ETHICISTS OF THE NCBC  
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“The Church’s commitment to human dignity inspires an abiding concern for the sanctity of human life from its very beginning, and with the dignity of marriage and of the marriage act by which human life is transmitted. The Church cannot approve medical practices that undermine the biological, psychological, and moral bonds on which the strength of marriage and the family depends.”  
—USCCB, *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, 5th ed. (2009), part 4 intro.

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### ❖ SUMMARY ❖

#### Core Issues

- The Church’s concern is for human persons and the salvation of souls, regardless of the unique struggles they may face. • There is no “gay gene” that suffices to establish same-sex attractions. Any genetic and environmental (psychosocial, emotional, etc.) influence that may contribute to same-sex attraction and the challenge of making moral choices does not deterministically establish a homosexual lifestyle. The free will is involved in choosing how to act. • Marriage can exist only between a man and a woman, who together have the ability to engage in the marital act, which is itself ordered to procreation.
- Children have the right to be conceived and raised by their biological parents united in the marriage bond. Marriage exists as the fundamental cell of society for the benefit of children and for the common good.

#### Same-Sex Attractions Are “Intrinsically Disordered”

- A same-sex attraction is a tendency ordered toward intrinsic moral evil, namely, genital acts between persons of the same sex. As such, the inclination itself, while not sinful, is intrinsically disordered. This basic truth cannot be ignored in any pastoral approach to persons experiencing same-sex attractions, though communicating it should involve delicacy and spiritual and personal accompaniment.

#### Granting “Spousal” Employee Benefits to Homosexual Couples Undermines Marriage and Family

- Justice requires the denial of any social and legal recognition to nonmarital relationships that claim marital status, including homosexual unions or “marriages.”
- It is immoral to consider same-sex partners as qualifying for “spousal” benefits, especially for a Catholic institution that publicly represents the Church.
- Words have meanings and educate: wrongly using terms like *marriage* and *spouse* to describe homosexual interactions causes serious scandal and undermines society’s understanding of marriage and family, bringing harm to all people, especially children, and thereby undermining the common good.
- It could be morally licit to grant homosexual partners of employees medical or other benefits through an employer, including a Catholic organization, by means of a broad and nonspecific category such as “adult dependent” or “legally domiciled adult” that included such persons in a larger group—with adult children and elderly parents, for example—that does not require or acknowledge a legally defined same-sex union or “marriage.”

❖ FAQ ❖

**Question 1.** The Church’s social teaching calls for universal access to basic medical care in connection with the call to heal the sick and serve the poor. Offering health care insurance benefits to same-sex partners of employees would increase access to medical care. How can it be immoral to do this?

*Reply:* The end does not justify the means. We cannot contradict the Church’s teaching on marriage, sexuality, and family as a means of achieving the end of increased access to basic medical coverage. Marriage and the family are the foundation of society in the Church’s social teaching, and so it is a social injustice to recognize same-sex relationships as if they were marital. Access to basic health care can be provided to all persons, including those who experience same-sex attraction, without the need to use the false construct of same-sex “marriage.” Nonspecific categories such as “adult dependent” might work for an employer offering coverage. If not, a decision by an employer not to provide health insurance coverage is not per se a decision to deny employees access to basic health care, since health care coverage can be accessed in other ways, without the employer’s involvement. For example, the Affordable Care Act has established health insurance exchanges in many states that should enable access to affordable coverage through government subsidies. (Note: Large employers may be financially penalized by the government for not offering health insurance.)

**Question 2.** In light of the emphasis Pope Francis has put on accompaniment in pastoral care, shouldn’t we emphasize God’s mercy in ministering to persons with same-sex attraction? Shouldn’t we accept these persons with understanding as homosexuals and not try to force them to be someone they are not?

*Reply:* It is indeed important to emphasize God’s mercy and to be personally present and supportive to those who bear this cross while recalling that genuine mercy demands truth. To be supportive we must admit the disorder of the inclination. It is degrading to accept and understand those with same-sex attraction simply as “homosexuals,” defining them solely on the basis of a supposed sexual “identity” as the measure of who they are. We must accept and understand them as children of God, equal in dignity and possessing a free will, who face the unique challenges of same-sex attraction. A ministry of mercy should show them God’s forgiving love, the truth of their dignity as human persons, and the strength of their will with God’s grace, and should help them overcome pressures and temptations to act on any inclinations that would deny their true identity and dignity.

❖ RESOURCES ❖

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Considerations regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons,” June 3, 2003, Vatican website.

Richard Fitzgibbons, “Same-Sex Attractions in Youth and Their Right to Informed Consent,” October 30, 2014, <http://www.childhealing.com/articles/ssayouth-if-imh.php>.

Philip M. Sutton, “Who Am I? Psychological Issues in Gender Identity and Same-Sex Attraction,” in *Fertility and Gender: Issues in Reproductive and Sexual Ethics*, ed. Helen Watt (Oxford: Anscombe Bioethics Center, 2011), 70–98.