



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

## DIocese OF BRIDGEPORT

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April 8, 2024

My Dear Pastoral Leaders:

It is with gratitude for the many people who were involved in the drafting of the attached pastoral instruction that I am pleased to present it to you as valuable guidance in your pastoral ministry.

*Wonderfully Made in God's Image and Likeness, A Pastoral Response to Gender Discordance* is the result of nearly eighteen months of research, discussion and consultation concerning the pressing pastoral need to accompany those who are facing the experience of gender discordance. In my judgment, the attached instruction is an authentic summary of the Church's teaching on the subject, while addressing in a sensitive and pastoral manner the many pastoral issues that arise from ministering to those experiencing gender discordance.

Accompanying this instruction is a memo that outlines the formational opportunities that will be offered for all pastoral leaders towards the proper implementation of this diocesan policy. I ask that you make every effort to attend these important webinars.

Finally, early this morning the Dicastery for Doctrine of the Faith issued a Declaration called *Dignitas Infinita* that addresses in a comprehensive manner the Church's teaching on the dignity of human life. Given its importance, I have also sent it to you for your review.

I look forward to meeting with you in the coming days to discuss in greater detail this important instruction.

Many thanks for your pastoral ministry on behalf of the adults and children entrusted to your care.

With every best wish for a Blessed and Joyful Easter season, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Frank J Caggiano  
Bishop of Bridgeport

## Pastoral Instruction

### *Wonderfully Made in God's Image and Likeness A Pastoral Response to Gender Discordance*

#### **I. Introduction**

1. Every human person is wonderfully made in the image and likeness of God. As we read in the Book of Genesis, God said “Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. . . God created mankind in his image... male and female he created them” (Genesis 1: 26-27). We join the Psalmist in praise of this truth, “You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works!” (Psalm 139: 13-14).
2. Faith and reason, theology and biology converge in confirming the objective reality of God’s intention when he created the human person. Each human person is unique and endowed with reason and free will. From the beginning, human persons were created with one of two different and complementary sexes, male and female. The two sexes are equal in dignity. Our biological sex, individual life and entire being is a gift received from God from the moment of conception and is genetically evident in every cell of our body.
3. Today, we see an emerging need to accompany with pastoral care our brothers and sisters who are experiencing gender discordance.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, this experience or how they are treated has caused great distress both for them and for their loved ones. The Church wishes to minister to and accompany our brothers and sisters experiencing gender discordance and to remind them not to be afraid, for “not one of [us] has escaped the notice of God” (Luke 12:7).
4. The purpose of this document is to provide all priests, deacons, diocesan officials, parish leaders, Catholic school teachers and administrators within the Diocese of Bridgeport with the necessary foundations in Catholic theology, as well as pastoral norms, so that they may accompany in charity and truth people who are experiencing gender discordance in real and complex circumstances. These norms shall inform and guide pastoral ministers to speak the truth in love to people who are struggling with these grave questions. The norms presented in this document are neither arbitrary nor intended to inflict harm on any member of our communities.
5. This pastoral instruction has three sections. It begins with a brief theological exposition of what God has proposed regarding sexuality and gender, which is taught by the Catholic faith and speaks to the truth, beauty and goodness of the human

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, the term “gender discordance” will be used to refer to the experience of a discrepancy or misalignment between one’s biological sex and their perceived gender identity. While others may be more familiar with the term “gender dysphoria,” this term often indicates a particular medical diagnosis of someone who has experienced gender discordance.

person. The second section is an outline of five fundamental principles that shall govern all pastoral ministry. It ends with a series of pastoral norms designed to assist clergy, pastoral and school leaders to accompany better those who experience gender discordance in truth and charity.

6. We begin this pastoral instruction reiterating the Church's perennial and unchanging belief that every human person is sacred, endowed with inherent dignity, and of inestimable value. No human person is ever to be an object of scorn, hatred or violence for any reason, including our brothers and sisters who are experiencing gender discordance. As pastoral ministers of the Gospel, we are called to lead all persons to know that they are loved by God, created in the divine image and likeness, and that God has made each of us his beloved son or daughter. All that we are, including our mind, life, body, and soul are gifts freely and lovingly given to each of us by God that we should receive with gratitude and joy.

## **II. Theological Foundations**

### ***A. The Fundamental Relationship between Truth and Love***

7. At the heart of all pastoral ministry is the recognition that truth and love find their union in the person of Jesus Christ, who is Truth and Love, and who seeks to draw us close to Himself and walk with us on the way (cf. Luke 24:15).

Because truth and love are intimately united in the person of Christ, we are never called to choose one over the other but must live both. When truth and love work together, they blossom into something remarkable: a life lived in the joy of an authentic interior freedom. The Lord's commandments reveal His mercy and lead us on the path to heaven. The love contained within them opens our minds and hearts to encounter the living God.<sup>2</sup>

8. Truth, therefore, is more than the objective teaching about a singular moral issue. Rather, the fullness of truth affirms the entire dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God. Such truth is revealed by God, and we must receive it in generosity of heart. Truth is a divine gift and not a human construct.

Love, understood as Christian charity, is always conformed to the truth. Thus, love seeks to bring those parts of our lives that have been subjected to sin and suffering out of the darkness and into the marvelous light of truth (cf. 1 Peter 2:9). In short, love requires telling the truth, no matter how painful, so that we may walk with a person and discover together how the truth, who is Christ (Jn. 14:6), may lovingly transform a person's life.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 12: "God's commandments show man the path of life and they lead to it."

## **B. The Meaning of the Human Person**

9. We live in a culture that is hostile to the moral values rooted in our Catholic faith. Consequently, truths revealed by faith are often replaced by an appeal to feelings, opinions, and moral relativism. Specifically, the experience or perception of being transgender is made possible by a combination of cultural influences that form the secular view of the human person. These cultural influences include: 1) a dualism or radical separation of body and soul which reduces the body and sex to mere physical realities, divorced from any spiritual connotations;<sup>3</sup> 2) an extreme individualism which exalts the rights of the individual over their responsibility to serve the common good; 3) an exclusive appeal to a person's emotions or desires which are experienced uniquely by the individual and lead to a radical individualism in which no one can "disagree with another's truth" and 4) an impoverished understanding of human freedom that idolizes personal choice and fails to understand true freedom as the ability to choose the good. Each of these in their own way distorts the gift of life as given to us by God, who provides both the origin and end of human existence.
10. In contrast to our secular culture, the Catholic understanding of the human person affirms that the body and soul form a composite unity. The body is not merely a vehicle or container for a person's soul but "shares in the dignity of 'the image of God.'"<sup>4</sup>

"Though made of body and soul, man is one. Through his bodily composition he gathers to himself the elements of the material world; thus, they reach their crown through him, and through him raise their voice in free praise of the Creator. For this reason, man is not allowed to despise his bodily life, rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and honorable since God created it and will raise it up on the last day."<sup>5</sup>

In other words, our bodies form an essential unity with our souls and our bodies are an essential component to the unique identity given to us by God.

11. Understanding humanity's existence as created from the beginning as male and female helps us to understand that there are two distinct ways of living our humanity, each rooted in biological sex. The fullness of the meaning of human life, therefore, is not found solely in being male or female, but in both together, uniting to form a communion that reveals the fullness of humanity always at the service of life. In this light, our bodies take on a sacramental nature that reveals to us that we are oriented towards the other and are not complete in ourselves. "*The formation of one's identity is itself based on the principle of otherness, since it is precisely the direct encounter*

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Favala, A. (2022). *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory*. "God forms the human (the *ādām*) from the humus of the soil and breathes into his body, animating him with the divine breath of life. This imagery reveals an important truth about our nature: we are both earth and breath, matter and spirit. We are physical creatures; our bodies are integral to who we are. Yet we are not merely matter, because God's breath enlivens each of us with an immaterial soul"(p. 29).

<sup>4</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 364.

<sup>5</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 14.

between another “you” *who is not me* that enables me to recognize the essence of the “I” who is me.”<sup>6</sup> In short, we do not fully recognize what it means to be male until we recognize what it means to be female and vice-versa.

12. Secular gender ideology today casts doubt on Jesus’ confirmation of a person being born either male or female.<sup>7</sup> Instead, this ideology proposes a variety of genders or the act of dissociating gender from one’s biological sex, thus blurring the complementary differences between men and women in their proper distinctions, which together form the fullness of what it means to be human.<sup>8</sup> “It needs to be emphasized that ‘biological sex and the socio-cultural role of gender can be distinguished but not separated.’”<sup>9</sup> Further, to deny this complementarity based on the relationship between man and woman, radically shifts the understanding of motherhood, fatherhood, and the human family – which is at the centerpiece of human existence. This is further confirmed in the reality of the Incarnation, where the only begotten Son of God took on human flesh specifically as a male person.
13. Since we have been created as relational beings, “man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons, which man and woman form from the very beginning.”<sup>10</sup> The excessive focus of the individual outside of relationships limits the flourishing of the individual, who can only find fullness in the sincere gift of self. “Valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different.”<sup>11</sup>

Humanity, in both its masculine and feminine expressions, becomes the image of the Triune God and, “...efficaciously transmits in the visible world the invisible mystery hidden in God from eternity.”<sup>12</sup> This complementarity brings forth the fruitfulness of life: “It is not man alone who is the image of God or woman alone who is the image of God, but man and woman as a couple who are the image of God. The difference between man and woman is not meant to stand in opposition, or to be subordinate to each other in any way, but is for the sake of communion and generation, always in the image and likeness of God.”<sup>13</sup> This image, an eternal and essential component of the plan of divine wisdom, is therefore frustrated and inhibited by any attempt to disconnect the body in its physical reality from the divine and spiritual image that it is created to reveal. Rather, we must always receive and celebrate the truth that “...through its bodiliness, its masculinity and femininity, humanity becomes a visible

<sup>6</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Male and Female He Created Them*, 27. [Emphasis original]

<sup>7</sup> “From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female” (Mark 10:6).

<sup>8</sup> “In this way the meaning of humanity’s original unity, through masculinity and femininity is expressed as an overcoming of the frontier of solitude”, Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 9:2

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 56; quoting the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio Finalis* (24 October 2015), 58.

<sup>10</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 9:3.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 155.

<sup>12</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 19:4.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, General Audience of April 15, 2015.

sign of the economy of Truth and Love, which has its source in God Himself and was revealed already in the mystery of creation.”<sup>14</sup>

14. Finally, it is undeniable that some gender stereotypes exist in our society that caricature an authentic complementarity of the two sexes, man and woman. Trying to escape such stereotypes can easily lead to the mistaken conclusion that a person must radically change his or her body to create conformity between a given trait and the person’s biological sex. Such a conclusion only serves to reinforce such stereotypes and caricatures.<sup>15</sup>
15. We are also witnessing a growing gender ideology that is permeating our society, advocating gender reassignment even among children. In the words of Pope Francis, this ideology is the “ugliest danger” of our times because it cancels out all differences that make humanity unique.<sup>16</sup> “It is not a healthy attitude which would seek to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it.”<sup>17</sup> “Therefore, all attempts to obscure reference to the ineliminable sexual difference between man and woman are to be rejected: ‘We cannot separate the masculine and the feminine from God’s work of creation, which is prior to all our decisions and experiences, and where biological elements exist which are impossible to ignore.’”<sup>18</sup> As Christians, we are called instead to rediscover the beauty of humanity’s creation as male and female, the divine response to the first aspect of creation that God found not to be good: man alone (cf. Genesis 2:18).

### C. Authentic Human Freedom

16. Secular culture often understands human freedom to be the ability to do whatever one desires with minimal constraints, so long as no one is harmed and the legitimate freedoms of another person are not inhibited. In contrast, Catholic faith understands freedom not as an ability to choose what we wish but as our ability to choose the true good and move towards the fulfillment of our true human nature.<sup>19</sup> Given our personal sinfulness, choosing the true good is not always easy or realized. “Thus, human freedom, in its turn, needs to be freed.”<sup>20</sup> Authentic freedom is empowered by

<sup>14</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 19:5.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, General Audience of April 15, 2015: “I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution. In order to resolve the problems in their relationships, men and women need to speak to one another more, listen to each other more, get to know one another better, love one another more.”

<sup>16</sup> Remarks made by Pope Francis at the International Symposium, “Man-Woman; Image of God: Towards an Anthropology of Vocations,” March 1-2, 2024, Vatican News Service.

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 155.

<sup>18</sup> Dicastery for Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration “Dignitatis Infinita” on Human Dignity*, April 8, 2024, 59.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Bundestag, September 22, 2011: “We must listen to the language of nature and we must answer accordingly...there is also an ecology of man. Man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself. In this way, and in no other, is true human freedom fulfilled.”

<sup>20</sup> Dicastery for Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration “Dignitatis Infinita” on Human Dignity*, April 8, 2024, 29.

the gift of faith and the acceptance of the Lord's merciful and forgiving grace in our daily life. With the Lord's assistance, authentic freedom can choose goodness in every circumstance of life.<sup>21</sup> With such freedom, we can live in harmony with objective truth and seek both happiness now and in the life to come.

17. There is a distinction between what is objectively true and a person's subjective experience or perception. Subjective experience can be based on a person's circumstances, perspectives, and history. For example, given the radical unity of body and soul and the inherent relationship between gender and biological sex, it is objectively not possible to be "trapped in the wrong body". At times, this objective truth stands in contrast to what a person may subjectively feel or perceive. We can never forget that there is an essential difference between acknowledging a person's subjective perception of gender discordance and any affirmation that such a perception is objectively true.

Authentic freedom does not empower a person to choose his or her gender but invites each person to discover, understand and live the deepest truth of who he or she is as a child of God "who makes all things work for the good for those who love Him" (Romans 8:28).

18. In light of authentic freedom, overcoming the challenges we may face is never achieved by evading them. Rather, true personal accompaniment helps people to discover the underlying causes of their feelings to identify whatever may have contributed to their creation. "Moral value is connected with the dynamic process of man's inmost [being]. To reach it, it is not enough to stop 'on the surface' of human actions, but one must penetrate precisely the interior."<sup>22</sup>

### **III. Five Fundamental Pastoral Principles**

#### **19. Affirming the Inherent Dignity of the Human Person:**

All pastoral ministry must affirm, support and enhance the dignity of every human person. Created in the image and likeness of God, who is Love, "the human person is the kind of being to whom the only proper response is love."<sup>23</sup> Such dignity is God-given and not self-determined. While we can offend our human dignity, we can never lose it nor take it away from someone else. Thus, all ministry must protect the dignity of every human person, while acknowledging that every person is called to radical holiness in Jesus Christ.

#### **20. Accompanying every person within the circumstances of their life:**

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 17. "Man achieves such dignity when he frees himself from all subservience to his feelings and in a free choice of the good, pursues his own end by effectively and assiduously marshalling the appropriate means."

<sup>22</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 24: 3.

<sup>23</sup> Wojtyła, Karol. *Love and Responsibility*.

All pastoral ministry must lovingly bring every person before the demands of truth within the real circumstances of the person's life. Just as God did not wait for humanity to be perfect before He entered the midst of it in the Incarnation, so, too, in our own suffering, we are called to accompany all our brothers and sisters to the path that leads to fullness of life in Christ. Often, a person will experience resistance to following the path of virtue. For this reason, we are asked to accompany the persons we serve with compassionate love, proposing not just a series of rules and regulations, but demonstrating the gift of interior freedom that a life of virtue proposes, even in the midst of trials and suffering.

Any pastoral accompaniment presupposes a full presentation of the doctrines and dogmas of the Catholic faith, and an ongoing encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. The Gospels make clear that the Lord always encountered people first, making His presence known, before calling them to a change of heart and life. Such conversion was made possible by receiving and responding to the Lord's love and grace.

As pastoral ministers, we are called to encounter each person in his or her totality without reducing a person to one aspect of his or her life. Ultimately, we are asked to lead our people to encounter a Divine Person whose presence speaks deeply to our hearts with an authority unlike any other. Christ alone invites every person to a radical conversion of life. This continued closeness of Jesus Christ to His people is continually expressed through His Church, most especially in her ministers and teachings.<sup>24</sup>

Given this fundamental principle, the application of moral principles is never simply an abstract or theoretical activity. Rather, it is about the good of individual persons and their growth in holiness as God intended them to be. Every person is called to become a saint, a person who deeply knows, loves and serves the Lord and is an instrument of His merciful love. "It makes no difference whether one is the master of the world or the 'poorest of the poor.' Before the demands of morality, we are all absolutely equal."<sup>25</sup>

## **21. A commitment for holistic, collaborative pastoral ministry:**

Due to the different needs of our brothers and sisters who experience gender discordance, prayerful discernment, communication with ecclesial authority, and collaboration with competent professionals are important components of effective pastoral ministry. Few persons can truly claim to be experts in the complexities of ministering to those who experience gender discordance. Thus, "the primary outlook

<sup>24</sup> "Special care ought to be taken to ensure that those carrying out the ministry of the Church not use their positions of leadership to advocate positions or behaviors not in keeping with the teachings of the Church. They must not belong to groups that oppose Church teaching. It is not sufficient for those involved in ministry to adopt a position of distant neutrality with regard to Church teachings", USCCB, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines to Pastoral Care*, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Pope John Pal II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 96.

needed for anyone who wishes to take part in *dialogue is listening*.<sup>26</sup> A holistic pastoral approach must utilize theological, philosophical, psychological, and medical insights to accompany people in their search for the fullness of truth.

## **22. *Salus Animarum Suprema Lex* (“The salvation of souls is the supreme law”):**

All pastoral ministry is ordered towards facilitating a personal and transformative encounter with the merciful love of Christ. It ensures that each person is aware that they are a beloved son or daughter of a Father whose love is unconditional. It gently reminds us to repent of our sins. It makes present through accompaniment the merciful, suffering Christ who seeks never to let us bear our burdens alone. An encounter with our merciful Lord allows a person to experience God’s profound and personal love, His call to leave behind our sinfulness while accompanied in suffering, and a reawakened personal desire to seek the fullness of life, truth and love through His grace. In short, all pastoral ministry exists to invite people to holiness and walk with them towards eternal life.

Given this supreme law, we must never indiscriminately reject a person’s participation in the life of the Church based on his or her experience of gender discordance. Rather, we must seek ways to accompany these brothers and sisters in the very real situations they face and walk with them on a journey whose ultimate destination is the fullness of truth and eternal life. Thus, while there will likely be times when we cannot grant a person’s request because it may conflict with the teachings of our faith, it is important to remember that such decisions are not synonymous with making a moral judgment about the state of a person’s soul before God, who alone is Judge and Savior. Determinations of moral culpability always remain the subject matter of the internal forum, which is primarily a forum of mercy and healing.

## **23. Fostering trust for true pastoral accompaniment.**

Pastoral norms gain true effectiveness within a relationship of trust, care, and concern between the pastoral minister and the person we wish to serve.

True accompaniment is an ongoing spiritual relationship, often facing both trials and triumphs, moments of profound challenge and experiences of intellectual questioning. The journey of accompaniment is a commitment to the profound good of the other person and the commitment, on all sides, to adopt a posture of listening first.<sup>27</sup> True spiritual accompaniment always takes place in a prayerful and intentional way that allows for all involved to be open ever more deeply to the presence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>26</sup> Congregation for Education, *Male and Female He Created Them*, 8. [Emphasis original].

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Bundestag, “I think that, even today, there is ultimately nothing else we could wish for but a listening heart.”

The health and well-being of each person we encounter must always be taken into consideration. If a situation arises where a person expresses a risk of harm to self or to others, the safety of each person must always be a top priority and must always be taken seriously. Steps must be taken to inform the person of the limits of confidentiality and disclose only what is absolutely necessary to meet the immediate safety needs of the individual by notifying civil authorities in addition to the Office of Safe Environment.

#### **IV. Pastoral Norms**

##### **A. General Considerations**

24. All priests, deacons, diocesan officials, parish leaders, school teachers and administrators must review carefully these norms so that they may engage in proactive, collaborative pastoral discernment regarding how best to accompany those persons experiencing gender discordance, including those who have undergone surgery or other medical treatments as a means of changing their perceived identity.
25. The Diocese will review and update these norms as warranted, especially if additional guidance is received from either the Church's Magisterium or the human sciences.
26. The Diocese will maintain and update a library of resources, Catholic therapists, formators, and speakers who can assist local communities, parents, and families with developing pastoral plans for accompaniment.

##### **B. Need for Formation**

27. The Diocese will offer regular opportunities of ongoing formation for clergy, parish ministers, and Catholic school leaders, including parents. Topics that will be addressed include how to respond appropriately when a person comes forward in personal crisis, the appropriate use of the 211 crisis line, general principles for pastoral accompaniment, and a deepening understanding of the theology of the human person.
28. Catholic school teachers and diocesan employees will be given appropriate formation to ensure that they are equipped to offer accompaniment and support.
29. Students in our Catholic schools and parish-based faith formation programs will be offered age-appropriate formation on the Church's teaching regarding the dignity and creation of the human person in all aspects.<sup>28</sup> This formation will be done by someone who is properly trained and will never be undertaken without the knowledge and approval of the pastor, principal and parents.

<sup>28</sup> Central to this formation will be an introduction to the Theology of the Body as taught by Pope Saint John Paul II.

### C. Community Life

30. All forms of bullying, intentional and arbitrary exclusion, gossip, slander, or physical harm of anyone, particularly our brothers and sisters who are experiencing gender discordance can never be tolerated or condoned in our Catholic communities. Such sinful acts must be addressed immediately by local leadership, seeking both the conversion of the offender and the healing of the person offended.
31. The ontological reality of a person's gender, given at conception, revealed at birth and inseparable from the person's biological sex, must guide all public pastoral ministry. More specifically, this means that in all public pastoral circumstances, the use of a person's preferred name and/or pronouns intended to align with the person's perceived gender identity, rather than their biological sex, is never appropriate or acceptable. To use a preferred name or pronoun in such a public forum would be to affirm something that is not objectively true and will complicate our desire to accompany the person to the fullness of the truth.
32. In certain private and confidential circumstances, especially when a person experiencing gender discordance is experiencing severe stress or facing a personal crisis, it may be permissible for a duly qualified pastoral leader or counselor to *temporarily* use a person's preferred name or pronoun when the following criteria are met: (1) it is as an *intermediate step* towards the creation of sustained personal accompaniment, (2) such an accommodation will have no adverse effect on the well-founded hope for the person experiencing gender discordance to come to understand and accept the truth that God has revealed to the person, and (3) this practice is not extended to the public forum.
33. Access to gender specific facilities or groups divided by gender must also be based on a person's biological sex. To do otherwise would signal affirmation that the changing of one's gender is in line with objective truth, which does not accompany a person to the truth or foster opportunities for healing and conversion of heart.
34. The proper use of a person's name or pronoun and access to gender-specific facilities or groups must guide all related pastoral situations where gender-specific policies are in place, such as (but not limited to) registration forms, uniforms, athletic participation, and other extracurricular activities.
35. When the person who is experiencing gender discordance is a minor, the parents, as the primary witnesses to the faith, must be involved in discussions around the proper pastoral guidance to be given to their child. Such parents also need to be supported and accompanied as they address the needs of their children who find themselves in such circumstances.
36. If there is any perceived risk of harm to the minor by involving the parents in the discussion, local leaders must contact the Office of Safe Environment, and if warranted, civil authorities.

37. As ministers of the Gospel, all diocesan, parochial and school employees are expected to live a life consistent with the Church's teachings on faith and morals. This applies to all pastoral situations, not just persons experiencing gender discordance. Such a consideration is always a condition of employment and must be included in all offers of employment or employment agreements. Further, there may arise situations which will prevent a person from being offered employment by the Church or an employee continuing in his or her ecclesial position because it has become known that he or she is living a life clearly inconsistent with the basic teachings of the Church's faith and its precepts. Such behavior is harmful because it creates public scandal or confusion among the faithful. When local leaders confront such a situation, they are required to contact the Diocesan Office of Human Resources before any actions are implemented.

#### **D. Sacramental and Liturgical Life**

38. In the sections that follow, general norms for the proper celebration of the sacraments are outlined, specifically related to persons who are experiencing gender discordance. Additional guidance will be available when the Diocesan Sacramental Norms and Liturgical Guidelines are published later this year.

Further, it remains the obligation of the pastor to ensure that a person is properly formed in the purpose and effects of the sacrament being sought, as well as to ensure, as best as possible, a proper interior disposition exists for the valid and worthy reception of the sacrament.

39. In Baptism, we receive divine adoption as beloved sons or daughters of our Heavenly Father, in and through the biological sex with which we are conceived. This means that within the Church's sacramental life, all members of the Christian faithful are to be treated in a manner consistent with their biological sex.

40. In accordance with recent guidance issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith,<sup>29</sup> persons who are experiencing gender discordance, including those who have undergone surgery or other medical treatments as a means of changing their perceived identity, may receive the Sacraments of Baptism and/or Confirmation, if the following norms are followed:

- a. The local pastor is required to avoid all public scandal in these cases.<sup>30</sup>
- b. These sacraments must be celebrated in a private ceremony, attended by those who are aware of the special circumstances involved.

<sup>29</sup> Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Answers to Several Questions from His Excellency, the Most Reverend José Negri, Bishop of Santo Amaro, Brazil, Regarding Participation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony by Transgender Persons and Homosexual Persons, October 31, 2023.

<sup>30</sup> In the context of faith, scandal is not merely public outrage. Rather, it is directly related to respect for the souls of others. In this way, scandal is understood to be leading others to an incorrect understanding of the truths of the faith, whether by direct action or mere influence, including influence by fashion or opinion (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2284-2287).

41. Persons who are experiencing gender discordance, including those who have undergone surgery or other medical treatments as a means of changing their perceived identity, may be allowed to serve as sponsors for Baptism and/or Confirmation, provided they meet all the criteria set forth by the Code of Canon Law and the following norms:
- a. The local pastor is required to avoid all public scandal in these cases.
  - b. Whenever possible, such sacraments must be celebrated in a private ceremony, attended by those who are aware of the special circumstances involved.
  - c. In such circumstances, in accordance with Canon 873, there is to be only one sponsor for the sacrament of Baptism in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

It is also important to remember that the ability to serve as a sponsor for Baptism or Confirmation is not a right but a privilege.

42. In accordance with Canon 912, those who are not impeded by law, including those who are experiencing gender discordance, including those who have undergone surgery or other medical treatments as a means of changing their perceived identity, are to be admitted to Holy Communion provided that the person is not obstinately persisting in manifest grave sin, in accordance with Canon 915.
43. It is always the responsibility of the Church to ensure that nothing stands in the way of a valid and licit reception of the gift of Marriage (cf. Can. 1066). As the Catholic understanding of marriage consists of both a unitive and procreative dimension, marriage must always be contracted between one man and one woman, understood through the biological sex of each individual (cf. Can. 1055 §1). Additionally, there remains other canonical conditions for the valid reception of the sacrament which must always be met. These include but are not limited to true freedom to give consent, openness to the creation of human life, and a true understanding of the essential obligations of marriage (Can. 1095).
44. As both a spiritual and corporal work of mercy, a Catholic funeral is not to be denied to any validly baptized Catholic, except in cases of grave scandal and only with the express authorization of the Diocesan Bishop (cf. Can. 1184). Given the liturgical connections between baptism and the funeral rites, it is the ordinary practice of the Church to use a deceased person's baptismal name during the celebration of the person's funeral liturgy. In the case of a validly baptized person who underwent a public transition of their perceived gender, including those who have undergone surgery or other medical treatments as a means of changing their perceived identity, and has lived publicly under this perceived identity for a substantial amount of time, it may be permissible, with the permission of the Diocesan Bishop, to use an alternative, legal name during the funeral rite. In such a case, great care should be taken to avoid public scandal or the disorientation of the faithful. In such cases, an appropriate option may be to celebrate the Mass of Christian Burial privately.

45. In the Diocese of Bridgeport, persons who are experiencing gender discordance, including those who have undergone surgery or other medical treatments as a means of changing their perceived identity, may be allowed to serve as liturgical ministers in their respective parishes only if the following requirements are met:
- a. There is no risk for public scandal among the faithful of the parish.
  - b. The person in question is well known to the pastor and receives the pastor's recommendation and
  - c. The petition is sent to the Diocesan Bishop for his review and judgment.

Without the Bishop's mandate, no lay person is permitted to exercise any liturgical ministry in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

46. Any request to change the name that appears in sacramental registries cannot be granted, given the fact that the entry reflects a moment in time that cannot be retroactively changed. If pastors receive a court ordered mandate to do so, they should contact Diocesan Legal Counsel for further guidance.

## **V. Conclusion**

47. Catholic faith proposes a new way of looking at the world in Jesus Christ. It sees all things in light of the truth about the human person revealed in the Incarnation. Each person is created in the divine image, which is fully realized in the complementarity of male and female. We are redeemed through the merciful love of Jesus Christ, poured out in the Paschal Mystery. The human person, male or female, is loved by God by virtue of their creation and not by any human merits. Our Heavenly Father sees all His creation as worthy of His love.
48. For all who minister in the name of Christ, let us recommit ourselves to serve our brothers and sisters who are experiencing gender discordance. Let us invite them to find a loving home in the Catholic Church, among brothers and sisters who will authentically love them and accompany them in their journey towards the fullness of truth and life that comes only in Jesus Christ.