



## **Sexuality and Gender Identity Policy FAQ**

**September 1, 2023**

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### **Q. Why is the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland releasing this policy now?**

A. In response to societal trends and at the request of church and school leadership, the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland has taken existing guidance and practice in matters of sex and sexuality and developed them into a formal policy. Since questions of sex, sexuality, and gender identity have become increasingly prevalent in our society, it is our hope that the policy will help to ensure these matters are addressed in a consistent and authentically Catholic manner across our diocesan institutions and Catholic schools and that those we serve will have a clear understanding about expectations and accommodations related to those matters. It is important that this policy not be viewed in isolation but in tandem with the related pastoral and theological resources on the Diocese's website at [dioceseofcleveland.org/humansexuality](https://dioceseofcleveland.org/humansexuality).

### **Q. To whom does this policy apply?**

A. The policy applies to the Diocese and its parishes. This would include, for example, schools operated by the diocese or a parish (including interparochial schools), as well as any diocesan or parish religious education programs, sacramental preparation programs, and youth ministry activities for our youth up to 18 years of age.

### **Q. Who was involved in the development of this policy?**

A. A group of experts representing related disciplines throughout the diocese contributed to the development of the policy, including a moral theologian, leaders of the Office of Parish Life and Marriage and Family Ministry, the Legal Office, the Office of Catholic Education, and the Presbyteral Council.

### **Q. Doesn't this policy discriminate against those who are questioning or experiencing gender confusion?**

A. No. The policy is not intended to discriminate against anyone, but rather to communicate the goodness of our embodied nature and how being made, male and female, in God's image guides our actions when facing particular situations. The policy's introductory language states clearly that we are called to treat all people, without exception, with respect, compassion, and sensitivity and that we are to avoid unjust discrimination. This policy simply provides direction for our school and parish leaders on how to uphold Catholic teaching and set clear expectations for all who attend our schools or participate in school or parish activities. Coupled with the pastoral and theological resources on the Diocese's website, it helps to foster a holistic understanding of what it means to be created male and female in God's image and how this reality should impact the way we see ourselves and others.

### **Q. This policy appears to limit individuals' rights to express themselves and limits free speech – is that legal?**

A. Our Catholic institutions are places in which we strive to promote the Gospel and our schools places in which we seek to help students develop in virtue, knowledge, and holiness. They have never been open forums for individuals to express themselves without limit, regardless of the topic. As Catholics, we abide by the Church's teaching and moral principles, including those around sexuality and gender identity, and we must model those principles in how we live. Everyone is welcome in our schools and churches, with the understanding that by voluntarily accepting the invitation to be a part of a Catholic community, a person also accepts the responsibility of striving to live virtuously in conformance with the Church's

teachings. With that said, the policy does allow for candid discussion and the expression of disagreement and on these issues in the proper context, such as during a classroom lesson covering these topics.

**Q. Do you have to be Catholic to go to Catholic schools? If not, why can't you disagree with the Church?**

A. No, you do not have to be Catholic to go to a Catholic school. In fact, many non-Catholic students attend our schools to get an academically excellent education that is informed by the values of the Catholic Church. We understand that not all our students agree with or believe in everything the Catholic Church teaches. However, by voluntarily becoming a part of a Catholic school community, all students, Catholic or not, accept the responsibility of striving to do good and avoiding what is not, consistent with Catholic moral teachings, and to follow all policies of the school.

**Q. If a student won't agree to this policy, does it mean that student can't be Catholic?**

A. A person becomes Catholic the moment they are validly baptized, which marks them indelibly as a member of the Body of Christ. One does not cease to be Catholic by disagreeing with the Church or even by committing sin. However, in certain circumstances, disagreeing with Church teaching or committing sin can affect a Catholic's ability to participate fully in the life of the Church. If, as a Catholic, you find yourself disagreeing with Church teaching, the first thing to do is to remember that you can trust Jesus and His Church. He gave us the Church so that He could be present to us even after He ascended to the Father. The Church, through its sacraments and teaching authority, is how we experience the real presence of Christ in our lives and come to know what He desires of us. Next, do your best to understand why it is that the Church teaches the thing you have trouble accepting. Often Catholics have trouble accepting certain teachings of the Church because they don't fully understand them or haven't been taught why it is that the Church teaches what it does. There are many great resources to help you understand the "why" of Church teaching, including the Catechism (<https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/XVIII/>), Catholic.com ([www.catholic.com](http://www.catholic.com)), and Word on Fire ([www.wordonfire.org](http://www.wordonfire.org)), just to name a few. Also, talking it through with a priest and other Catholics can be a great way to gain insight from others about goodness of Catholic teaching. Finally, remember that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be our advocate and guide. Pray to the Holy Spirit for wisdom and understanding when you're finding it challenging to understand or accept what the Church teaches.

**Q. Aren't you concerned that parents who disagree with this policy will pull their children out of Catholic schools?**

A. We believe our Catholic identity is what makes our schools attractive and meaningful. We certainly hope and pray that parents who seek an academically excellent Catholic education and/or to raise their children in the Catholic faith would not take them out of our schools because of this or any other policy. Instead, we would encourage any parent who has questions, concerns or disagreements regarding any aspect of this policy to reach out and dialogue with us before making any decision to withdraw their child.

**Q. How will you support students who are experiencing gender dysphoria or confusion?**

A. Our goal has been and will continue to be to support and accompany students and their families with the compassion, dignity and respect each child of God deserves. We will do this by emphasizing to students how much we love them and that we view their presence in our community as a gift. We will work to help them see that they are a beloved son or daughter of God and that they are defined not by any attraction, desire, or perception they may experience, but by the fact that they are made, body and soul, in the image of God, who loves them beyond measure. We will assure them that they are not alone, that struggling to understand what God asks of us in our lives is something every person experiences in some way, and that we are all in need of God's grace, mercy, and healing. Through accompaniment, we hope to help them see the goodness of the bodies that God has designed for them and that it is by seeking to do God's will in community with others doing the same that we truly come to know ourselves and our place in the world.

*Our Marriage and Family Ministry staff in the Office of Parish Life offers a number of resources to guide school and parish leaders; please visit [this page](#) of our website for more information.*

**Q. Will you offer separate restrooms?**

A. Per the policy, all persons must use the bathrooms or other facilities (locker rooms, etc.) that correspond to their God-given biological sex. However, when practical, available, and pastorally appropriate, the use of a single-user, unisex bathroom may be an accommodation for any number of reasons, including for students experiencing anxiety as a result of gender dysphoria or confusion.

**Q. Will you allow students/youth participants to specify their preferred pronouns or the names they would like to be called?**

A. Per the policy, we will use pronouns that accurately reflect the person's God-given biological sex and refer to students/youth participants by their legal name or an appropriate nickname, with the approval of parents or guardians. In certain situations it may also be pastorally appropriate to avoid the use of pronouns altogether for an individual in favor of using only that person's proper name.

**Q. How will you handle school dress codes for students who might not identify with their biological sex?**

A. Students are expected to adhere to the school uniform or dress code designated to their biological sex as determined by each individual institution's leadership. Some schools and parishes may also offer unisex options within their dress codes that are not differentiated by biological sex.

**Q. How does this policy impact an institution's code of conduct when it comes to gender expression?**

A. All persons are expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with their biological sex, and no person may publicly advocate or celebrate sexual orientation or identity in ways that are contrary to the Catholic Church's teaching or that could cause disruption, confusion, or scandal regarding the Catholic Church's teachings.

**Q. What if a student/participant tells a teacher or staff member that they are experiencing gender confusion? Will you keep that information confidential?**

A. The Catholic church teaches that parents are the first and most important educators of their children. Inasmuch as this is true, parents have a right to know about the challenges and struggles that their child may be having in order to be in a position to carry out their responsibilities as a parent and to properly guide their child through difficult or confusing times. Consequently, if it becomes known that a student is experiencing gender dysphoria or confusion, the institution (school, parish) will notify the minor's parents or guardian. Consideration should be given to how this is communicated in order that the child will feel supported and loved. However, if there is reasonable concern that notifying the parents/guardian will result in physical abuse of the minor, the institution will consult with the Diocese Legal Office and the Bishop's designated moral theologian prior to determining if such information should be disclosed.

**Q. I've heard that some diocesan high schools have support groups for people experiencing same-sex attraction, gender dysphoria, or gender confusion. Don't these types of groups promote things the Church disagrees with?**

A. When we experience struggles or hardships, Satan often attempts to get us to believe the lie that we are alone or abandoned, including by Christ and His Church. Consequently, we believe that it can be very helpful for some who experience same-sex attraction, gender dysphoria, or gender confusion to share their struggles with others who are experiencing the same things and to see that the Church wants to hear them and accompany them in those experiences and struggles. While some secular support groups promote things that are contrary to Catholic teaching, it is important to us that any groups affiliated with our diocese, parishes, and schools promote an authentically Catholic view of sex, sexuality, and gender, and encourage attendees to live holy and chaste lives. As a result, the Diocese will be working with schools that have or are interested in forming groups that create space for students to gather in friendship, prayer and support, while remaining faithfully Catholic, to ensure that they follow approved framework and guidelines and that group leaders undergo appropriate training.

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