

What I Learned from my Involvement with PFLAG

Bro. David Betz, SM - September 2026

I came out as a gay man in April of 1997, I was living in Cleveland, OH. By August 1997 I was reassigned to Cincinnati, OH. When I moved to Cincinnati, I felt that I needed to find some support in understanding this part of my reality. I found my way to PFLAG which at that time stood for Parents, Friends, and Family of Lesbians and Gays (Today in 2026 the acronym is still used but now the support has broadened to include advocacy and education plus many members from the LGBTQ+ community now participate.) PFLAG is a support network that was founded in 1972 by Jeanne Manford after an event where her son, Morty, was beaten because of his activism for supporting a gay rights law that was up for possible passage in NYC. She believed that it was important for parents to support their LGBT+ family members. She participated in one of the early Christopher St. Liberation Marches in June of 1972 with a sign inviting parents to unite in supporting their LGBT+ children. This spurred the development of chapters across the country and even internationally.

I soon discovered that a majority of the parents who attended the PFLAG meeting were Catholic and they turned to PFLAG because they were not feeling supported by the Catholic Church. They were asking questions such as: Am I going against my Catholic faith if I am supporting my child?; Will my child be damned for being gay or lesbian?; What can I do to support my child?; What will my family think? As it turned out, even though I was seeking support for myself as a gay man, I was finding that these parents needed a listening ear and presence when it came to their concerns in relation to their being part of the Catholic Christian Community. As I got more comfortable with being a gay man who is also Catholic and a religious, I discovered that walking with these parents was an added bonus. I was being called to be an individual who was and is willing to acknowledge the goodness of people and that the dignity of everyone needs to be respected and honored. And being part of the Imago Dei enables this to happen.

We have been created in the image and likeness of God. And this brings lots of responsibility when we are in relationship with others. It calls us to be people who recognize the importance of the human dignity of each person. Pope Leo writes in his encyclical, Magnifica Humanitas:

At the heart of the Christian understanding of the human person lies the great biblical affirmation that men and women are created in the image and likeness (cf. *Gen 1:26-27*) of the Triune God. Created for relationship, every human person is planned and willed by God to enter into communion with him, with others and with creation. Human dignity does not depend on a person's abilities, wealth or position in life, nor on the right or wrong choices made; instead, it is a gift that precedes and transcends each person, endowed by God as an expression of his unfailing love. (Paragraph 50)

And so my participation with PFLAG has been a prime example of engaging in the economy of God's unfailing love, especially in accepting my own authenticity as well as honoring the authenticity of others.