

LGBTQ Catholic Educators – People of Faith, People in Service to the Church

By Beth Garascia
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Why do LGBTQ educators, who serve the Roman Catholic Church with devotion and resilience despite the risk of being ousted, continue to work for the church they love? These amazing young men and women stay in Catholic communities and serve the Church as positive witnesses even though at times they aren't welcomed. The fact that so many continue to live out their calling to be Church ministers is a testament to their courage, love of Christ and His Church, and commitment to their profession and their students.

Because I am mother of two gay adult children, I have been nudged into speaking out for justice for LGBTQ persons, whom I had previously perceived to be very different than me. It angers me that they are still not accepted in some local parishes, that Church documents containing negative language about them have not been changed, and there is still an attitude of rejection of them among many Catholic persons. Despite this exclusion, many continue to practice their faith and are involved in a wide variety of ministries. Some are called to teach in our schools, others to study theology, and still others use their talent to minister in parishes and teach in Catholic universities. It is in some ways miraculous that they persevere.

As a result of my involvement, I've been gifted to come to know and love many LGBTQ persons whom I never would have met had I not become active in this ministry. They are wonderful and wounded, imperfect and striving to be their best selves, strong and vulnerable, just as all of us are. The people I've met live out their faith in a variety of ways. Some are active in parishes, some are not; most have a deeply spiritual way of looking at their sexual orientation and their other experiences, and a few follow the path of not only being active Catholics but also working for the institution. These are the ones who place their trust in God's protective love and who are most vulnerable to the decisions of the members of the hierarchy.

The fact that LGBTQ persons continue to be dismissed is deeply problematic. Those who are divorced, use contraceptives, or miss Sunday Mass are not fired, so it is the gay community who has been singled out for not following one specific Church teaching. This is despite the fact that one bedrock of our faith is our outreach to the vulnerable. Walking with the marginalized, including LGBTQ persons, is central to the mission of Jesus. The U.S. bishops taught us in 1997 in *Always Our Children* to "Welcome homosexual persons into the faith community and seek out those on the margins."

Despite the clear and consistent teaching of Jesus, we Christians sometimes continue to cling to a belief that our salvation will be earned by maintaining orthodoxy. Certainly, we need a structure of beliefs and our tradition to guide us, but we also need to remember the values of mercy and love and listen to what the marginalized have to say.

We in the Marianist Family are beginning to do this. However, there is still a lot of work to be done in the wider Church. Until the LGBTQ persons who minister within our Church community

don't fear losing their jobs for being who they are, we must continue to fight for justice, speaking out when someone in this community loses a job because of their sexual orientation.

Some good first steps might be coordinating recommendations nationally, asking the US Conference of Catholic Bishops to recognize the continuing removal of LGBTQ faculty, standardizing catechetical certifications, and addressing exclusionary language that enables current injustice. It's time to call the Church to stop inflicting psychological, spiritual, and economic pain on LGBTQ church workers.