



February 26, 2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council wrote about the Church's relation to the modern world, they began with this key truth: "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well."¹ The challenges of everyone in our society are near to my heart and the hearts of all the Catholic faithful in the Archdiocese of Detroit. As your shepherd, your spiritual father, and your brother on the path of discipleship, I share with you the concerns and challenges that you face in your families and, more broadly, in our culture. As a people of faith, we know that Christ desires to speak his truth and love into all cultural challenges in our society.

Among the most pressing challenges we face in contemporary society is how to rightly understand the human person according to God's plan. What does it mean to be a person? Am I good? Does God love me just as I am? What does it mean to be a man or woman? Is one's identity as a man or woman immutable and unchanging, or are gender and sex socially constructed or malleable realities that can shift with one's self-understanding? If I feel that my gender does not match the sex of my body, what am I to do? And finally, how should we, as the People of God in southeast Michigan, respond to these challenges so that the light of the Gospel shines on the darkness of confusion?

I share this letter out of deep pastoral concern for all of you and with these many questions in mind. I am especially mindful of those who assist in leading our parishes and schools, as well as parents of children who experience distress about their bodies or confusion about their gender. My aim is to share the Good News of the Gospel and the beauty of what God intended in his creation. At Synod 16 and in *Unleash the Gospel*, our local Church committed to a missionary conversion by "making one's relationship with Jesus and alignment with his will the central guiding principle of every aspect of life." This is a call for each of us to be actively engaged in the evangelizing mission of the Church to testify to the dignity given us by our creation in God's image and likeness.

¹ GS, 1.

UNLEASH THE GOSPEL

12 State Street, Detroit, MI 48226-1823 | 313-237-5800 | aod.org

Our baptism makes us adopted children of God, and as such our response is always to “fix our eyes on Jesus” (Heb 12:2) as the source of truth and light in our lives. That is why I chose this phrase as my episcopal motto. Whenever we feel lost or confused, it is right that we turn our eyes to Jesus, not with a quick glance, but to *fix our eyes* on him, knowing that “only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.”² When St. John Paul II began his teachings on the human person and sexuality – which composed a “theology of the body” – he began with the words Jesus used when the Pharisees questioned him about a cultural issue of their time. He pointed them to “the beginning”: to the creation account in the first chapters of Genesis. So, it is right for us to begin there, too.

PART I: THE CHRISTIAN VISION OF THE HUMAN PERSON

“Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth. God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:26-27).

This creation account from the Book of Genesis is the “beginning” to which Jesus calls us to return, revealing the beautiful and foundational truths about the human person. First among these truths is that we are not byproducts or accidents; we are *created*. To be created is to be chosen, willed, and intended. And because God is all-knowing, we were chosen from all eternity. From the beginning of time, you and I were chosen and willed into being by the God of all creation. For this reason, even today, parents are co-creators with God in the work of bringing a new child into the world. God is not absent from this reality, but wills to work in and through the design of the human body’s sexual complementarity in order to bring about new human life.

Secondly, we are not our own creators; our coming to be happens outside of ourselves. Life is a gift from God, given to us without our choosing or earning it. We can only receive it. This means that we are not the author of our own lives, nor do we have limitless autonomy over our lives. Just as mankind is called to exercise dominion over the rest of creation through proper stewardship and care of the earth, which Pope Francis refers to as “our common home,” we are called as well to treat ourselves – our bodies and our lives – with the stewardship that recognizes we are responsible to our Creator, who has entrusted to us the gift of life.

At the center of these truths about the human person as revealed in the creation account is the truth – reiterated numerous times – that we are made in God’s image: “Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness... God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them.” Why is this repeated? It is to drive home the point that mankind is distinct from the rest of creation. We are not simply another thing that has been made; rather, we are set apart from the rest of creation. Nothing else is made in God’s image like human beings. After each day of

² GS, 22.

creation, God looks at what he has made and calls it good. After the pinnacle of his earthly creation – man and woman – he declares this creation to be *very good* (Gen 1:31). And after this, nothing further needs to be made, nothing greater would come into being, and so, “God rested” (cf. Gen 2:1-2).

Being made in the image and likeness of God bestows upon us a human dignity which cannot be earned and can never be lost. This human dignity is what allows us to seek and find the most fundamental truths about who we are, why we were made, what it means to live a good life, and the nature of our eternal destiny.³ Persons are both material and spiritual: “the Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7). Body and soul are integral to the very constitution of the human person. We have been given the “breath of life” from God which bestows upon us his image and his likeness. We can know what is right and wrong, and we form our hearts and our actions to choose the good. The truth of the human person being both spiritual and material is crucial to rightly understanding who the person is. Our bodies are a key aspect of who we are: “The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the ‘form’ of the body: i.e., it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.” (CCC, 365)

“Male and female he created them.” This line in the account of creation reveals to us that our sex is willed by God at our creation and given to us as a gift. God willed that human persons would be either male or female. Sex is assigned, not by a doctor or the individual, but genetically and biologically by God in the act of creation. With very few exceptions, it is realized throughout every strand of DNA in each person’s body. We are not unaware that some of our brothers and sisters are born with rare genetic abnormalities causing disorders of sexual development, such as Klinefelter Syndrome and androgen insensitivity syndrome, and firmly believe God created them for a special purpose in life. Acknowledging these intersex conditions should open the floodgates to our compassion and sensitive accompaniment of these individuals. This should not, however, cause confusion about typical human genetics or biology.

These truths from the creation account lead us to an understanding of what St. John Paul II called “the spousal meaning of the body.” The body reveals who the person is – not only physically and anatomically, but also in the depths of his or her being. “The body, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden since time immemorial in God, and thus be a sign of it” (JPII, TOB 2-20-80). The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that “God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange” (221).

The body necessarily reveals the person as a boy or a girl, a man or a woman. Indeed, God’s first command to man and woman is to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). Men and women are

³ Cf. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2.

directed toward each other for this sacred task of bringing new life into existence. They need each other. In fact, in their distinction from each other – their sexual complementarity – they reveal this mutual dependency. Man comes to understand who he is by seeing that he is both like (in human dignity) and unlike (in sexuality) woman. And she understands herself in light of him. This equal dignity and sexual complementarity are part of what is “very good” about men and women. These truths about the human person form a unitive anthropology, or an understanding of the “person as a whole.” We are not disjointed, with a separation between our bodies and our identities. Rather, our bodies reveal to us and to others key aspects to understanding who we are. “The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father... Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology” (*Laudato Si*, para. 155).

PART II: THE CONTEMPORARY VISION OF THE HUMAN PERSON

In contrast to the unitive and Christian vision of the human person as created by God in his image, there is an alternate, “dualist” vision of mankind, growing in popularity in recent years. This vision sees the human person as inherently divided and separated; it claims that there can be opposition between a person’s body and soul. Dualism is not new; rather, the concept has been around for centuries, finding its roots in some pre-Christian thought. The notion of dividing a person between body and soul – or between mind and matter – is something that Christians have been combatting since the early centuries of the Church. In our day, modern technological advances serve to magnify exponentially the harm to individuals that can result from a dualist view.

According to the dualist view, the human person is not an integrated union of body and soul, but rather an immaterial self that possesses a material body. The real “person” is someone who uses the body, but who is not necessarily identified with the body. The body is regarded as a vessel or instrument that is sometimes helpful, sometimes neutral, and sometimes a hindrance to the goal of living as the “real self.” The person *uses* the body, but the body itself does not have personal value. In this dualist view, the body does not reveal the person but is simply something the person possesses and may manipulate for his or her own purposes. The radical personal autonomy proposed here says, “I can do anything I want with my body because there is no objective unity between my body and me.”

Dualism also shapes cultural ideas about sexual ethics, arguing that sexual activity is ultimately about “self-fulfillment.” Thus, as long as participants consent, almost any judgment about the goodness of sexual acts is completely subjective; there is nothing true or false, right or wrong about consensual sexual acts. When we say that the body has no personal value, we rob sexual acts of their intrinsic value. The only criterion is consent. This shallow and impoverished view of the sexual union between a man and a woman ignores the “spousal meaning of the body” and loses sight of every “person’s rightful due ... to be treated as an object of love, not as an object for use.”⁴

⁴ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), p. 42.

It obscures the spousal meaning of the body by replacing it with a fractured and compartmentalized view of the human person.

PART III: THE PARTICULAR CONCERN OF GENDER IDENTITY

The particular area of concern for this pastoral letter is the need to address the challenge of the dualist worldview as it relates to gender identity, specifically to those who feel confused personally about that identity, and especially those who are distressed by this confusion.

The term “gender dysphoria” is a diagnosis for the distress one may feel due to a perceived disparity between his or her personal sense of gender and biological sex. “Dysphoria” is a word that comes to us from the Greek words for “hard to bear” and is the opposite of the more common word “euphoria.” Prior to 2013, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5) used the term “Gender Identity Disorder” for this particular condition. In this letter, I have chosen to use the broader term “gender confusion” to include everyone who experiences such a disparity, whether or not it results in distress or dysphoria.

In general, the current treatment plan for those who have gender confusion includes “affirming” therapy, hormonal treatment, surgical procedures, and adopting new names, personal pronouns, and behaviors that align with one’s “chosen” gender, which may be inconsistent with one’s God-given biological sex. Increasingly, the medical community uses these treatments to provide what is called “gender affirming care,” which seeks to alter one’s behavior and body – surgically and/or hormonally – to match one’s perceived understanding of his or her gender. In such bodily altering interventions, one’s healthily functioning sex organs or exterior signs of being a man or woman are chemically or surgically removed or altered to cease functioning. These procedures are often an irreversible mutilation of a healthy body. Even children who express confusion about their gender are increasingly being prescribed “puberty blockers” to prevent their bodies from undergoing the natural process of sexual development, thus making it impossible for them to experience the normal process of their body’s maturation. All these procedures seek to change one’s body to align with one’s “chosen gender.” The scientific process of research, scrutiny, and objective results is manipulated in the name of this dualist view of the human person, which is often masked as compassion and gender-affirming.

Proposals to change one’s sex presuppose this dualist view of the human person, and so think of a person’s sex as malleable. It assumes that a person’s identity as a man or woman is not determined by biological reality—by the person’s given sexual identity as male or female—but by one’s feelings and desires. Feelings are given primacy in this judgment and treated as obviously true, leading to the use of the expression “the sex assigned at birth.” This expression suggests that one’s biological sex is merely a label arbitrarily assigned by an onlooker until the person can assess his or her own self-perceived identity. Pope Francis forcefully rejects the view that “to be a woman or to

be a man, [could] be an option and not a fact of nature” and unequivocally condemns “gender ideology” as “one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations.”⁵

What accounts for the denial in contemporary culture that the body reveals one’s identity as a man or a woman? There are likely many contributing factors, but the underlying problem is that our nature – our way of seeing and knowing the world – is wounded by original sin. Our fallen nature makes it difficult to recognize the truth about the human person that is manifested by nature and confirmed by the Gospel. As the *Catechism* explains, we inherit a nature “deprived of original holiness and justice.”⁶ As a result of the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, humans lost protection from death and are burdened with the inclination to sin, which we call concupiscence. Christ offers us the priceless gift of redemption, but even though baptism imparts his grace and erases sin, “the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle.”⁷

This inclination toward sin distorts human emotion and makes it difficult for people to recognize the body’s spousal meaning. Fallen humans find themselves inclined to regard the body as an object rather than see it with a spousal understanding. This inclination is evident in the temptation to disregard the body’s personal meaning and to live as if one owns or inhabits a body which can then be made to express whatever gender one chooses. It is important to bear in mind that our work of evangelization and catechesis suffers when the spousal meaning of the body is obscured. That is because, as noted by Bishop Michael Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia:

“So much of our faith rests on the natural truths of the human person, the body/soul unity, and the complementarity of man and woman. Jesus our Redeemer, the Son of God, assumes the body/soul unity of our human nature, sacrifices Himself and nourishes us by His Body, and is worshipped as the Bridegroom of the Church. The rejection of core natural truths regarding our humanity damages the “template” that God uses to reveal Himself to us and to manifest His salvific plan for us.”⁸

The dualist view of the human person reflects and promotes a fallacious understanding of the human person that leads to great harm. The pain of numerous people harmed by this gender ideology is real. That pain is made greater when people who suffer are encouraged to reject their innate identity as male or female and to renounce the moral law written in their hearts.

We must be especially cautious in making judgments about the culpability of those who are in such acute pain from gender confusion. Christ's revelation about the human person demands that we speak with clarity and charity about the moral law to help our brothers and sisters find the

⁵ Interview with journalist Elisabetta Piqué for the Argentine daily newspaper *La Nación*, *Catholic New Agency*, Rome (March 11, 2023), available at <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253845/pope-francis-gender-ideology-is-one-of-the-most-dangerous-ideological-colonizations-today>.

⁶ CCC 417

⁷ CCC 405

⁸ Bishop Michael Burbidge, “A Catechesis on the Human Person and Gender Ideology,” August 12, 2021.

fullness of human flourishing that Christ desires for them. It is difficult to imagine a clearer distortion of this flourishing than the case of a young person who is misled into thinking it is possible to change his or her bodily identity and that it is good to attempt to do so, taking drastic, irreversible steps to try to accomplish this change. Indeed, a growing number of people who have attempted to change their sex later profoundly regretted doing so, with many attempting to undo the damage by “detransitioning” back to their biological sex, often with serious complications and trauma caused by hormone blockers or, worse, the permanent mutilation of their bodies through surgical intervention.⁹

PART IV: THE GOSPEL RESPONSE

Individuals who face the challenge of gender confusion deserve, first and foremost, to receive our love, compassion, and support. We must lovingly accompany them by acknowledging their pain, listening to them, making sure they know they are heard, and assuring them of God’s personal love for them. Too often in our efforts to share the Good News we can lose sight of the good which comes from authentic accompaniment of individuals in pain. Stock answers or trite phrases often fall harmfully short. The suffering of those with gender confusion can be an isolation from oneself, which can be intensely destabilizing.

When Jesus encountered suffering and pain in the Gospel, it touched his heart. He allowed himself to be moved with compassion by the sufferings of others. In fact, the Incarnation – God becoming man – is a shocking example of Jesus’s solidarity with us in our suffering. It is a “scandalizing” act of compassion that reveals to us the face of God. Jesus chose to be with the poor and the suffering and the outcast. Therefore, we should never feel that anyone is too broken or confused for us to come alongside and offer the love and support which Christ desires people to receive through us.

Too often, however, there can be an insistence that compassion and accompaniment mean only that we should stand in solidarity with people and forego lovingly challenging them when their choices conflict with their real good. This would be to place a wedge between love and truth, attempting to separate them from each other, even though we know that “God is love” and Jesus is “the way, the truth and the life” (cf. 1Jn 4:7-8; Jn 14:5-6). Of course, truth devoid from love is harsh and can be used as a weapon. Our goal must never be to use truth to injure another person. But it is no less important to remember that “without truth, love degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way. In a culture without truth, this is the fatal risk facing love.”¹⁰ In the midst of our compassion, we must remember that it is never compassionate to approve of efforts to identify as other than one’s biological sex. Rather, to respond with true compassion means helping people see that such efforts can cause great harm. Imagine a cardiologist who seeks to be compassionate by affirming a patient’s smoking, or an obstetrician who avoids telling patients about the dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Far

⁹ See the testimonies at *Sex Change Regret*, available at <https://sexchangeregret.com/>.

¹⁰ *Caritas in Veritate*, 3.

from being acts of compassion, these would be acts of malpractice. Therefore, we must be no less clear in our proclamation of the good of the human body to those who have been deceived into thinking otherwise.

Families and loved ones are also affected whenever a person seeks to transition from one gender to the other. It is no doubt excruciating, for example, for parents to see their child suffering from distress about his or her body and to feel helpless to do anything about it. They may fear alienating their child if they challenge the identity their child is claiming. Not infrequently, parents are subject to manipulative claims that if they do not affirm their child's gender preferences, they risk driving him or her to suicide. These parents and families deserve our compassion and support as well. They also need to know that there is hope for spiritual healing; even those who have been harmed by medical and surgical transition can and do find healing when they are able to accept the gift of their bodies. Parents and families need to know that they have a special mission which includes radical love and radical commitment to the truth of the Gospel, affirming the goodness of the human body as created by God.

Our mission as the Church in southeast Michigan is to proclaim the Gospel in season and out of season. And as I wrote in *Unleash the Gospel*: "Our presentation of the Gospel's demands must be pastorally wise, meeting people where they are at and avoiding 'truth bombs' that will only turn them away."¹¹ Our response is not to become "cultural warriors" looking for a battle against those with whom we disagree. Neither is it to be bullied into silence or covered by the volume of voices who propose a disjointed view of reality. Rather, we must steadfastly and lovingly proclaim with conviction the Gospel that each and every person's body, as created, is made in God's image and likeness, and therefore possesses an inviolable dignity.

We need not be ashamed of this beautiful truth of the human person, revealed to us by the natural law and divine revelation. Our role in this age is to proclaim with confidence and joy the good news about the human person, who has been made in God's image and likeness and united to Christ by his Incarnation! By doing this we help our brothers and sisters rediscover what it means to be human and to value God's immutable gift of one's identity as a man or woman. God made humanity male and female not merely as incidentally different humans, but as two sexes who equally show forth God's image in their difference and in their complementarity. One's maleness or femaleness does not change, nor can it be altered.

Our certainty in the Gospel is not merely an intellectual proposition. Rather, it is the fruit of an encounter with the person of Jesus who desires the wholeness and flourishing of each human person. When we seek to accompany those who are hurting, we do so with the confidence that Jesus knows and understands their suffering. He does not know this in a distant or merely theoretical way. In taking on our flesh, he unites himself to all the suffering in the world and, therefore, knows deeply in himself all the wounds we each experience. Our love and compassion are rooted in our experience of Jesus's love for us and our letting him love others through us. Jesus's compassion

¹¹ UTG, Marker 1.2

ultimately leads to wholeness in a way that cannot be experienced apart from him. This wholeness is found in its perfect and everlasting sense when we are united with him in heaven. But it is not just promised later; he gives us a share in the here and now (cf. Eph 1:11-14).


In fact, God's great act of love is his union with the human race – in a body. He "took on flesh," and then, *in his body*, suffered and died for us. Jesus ascended into heaven both body and soul, and he continues to communicate his love for us through his Body, the Church. God's grace comes from our human interactions – being baptized with water, receiving Holy Communion, hearing the words of absolution by which our sins are forgiven. Seeing the person as a whole, that is, having a unitive anthropology, also means that our bodies are destined to be with us in eternity, as we profess in the Creed: "I believe in the resurrection of the Body and life everlasting." The final and most complete word on God's love for humanity is made known to us in the flesh of Jesus. How could we deny the goodness of the body or the unbreakable bond which exists between one's body and soul? To do so is to reject the eternal life offered to us through the body of Jesus.

PART V: MOVING FORWARD

My intention with this pastoral letter is to help us think with the mind of the Church and the mind of Christ about what it means to address the challenges of our time. This pastoral letter is meant as a condemnation of no one, but as a loving accompaniment to all. I hope this helps each of you let the wisdom of the Church form your thinking as you address the issue of gender identity in your communities. An important way in which we as the Church in Detroit will enliven this teaching through our institutions of evangelization – particularly our parishes and schools – will be found in new policies accompanying this document.

The foundation of the policies and this catechesis is this singular truth: Those who struggle with gender confusion are our brothers and sisters. They are sons and daughters of God and beloved members of our communities, never to be condemned nor rejected, but rather welcomed and accompanied on the path to the light of truth. Together, all of us have been created in love, redeemed at the cost of the life of Jesus, called to holiness, and invited into the same deep and abiding relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we entrust the struggles of those with gender confusion to the power and love of God. We in the Archdiocese of Detroit commit ourselves to listen, to show compassion, to share the truth, and to celebrate the fullness of our shared call to holiness. Our commitment to be Jesus's joyful missionary disciples demands nothing less!¹²

Sincerely yours in Christ,


The Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron
Archbishop of Detroit

¹² Unleash the Gospel, Foundational Conviction.



“The Good News About God’s Plan: A Pastoral Letter on the Challenges of Gender Identity” presents the wisdom of the Church on the matter of gender confusion and seeks to guide parents and ministers in parishes and schools in their efforts to provide pastoral care. It is important to note that the teachings presented in this new pastoral letter and reflected in the following policies are not new; the Church has always recognized the human person as an integrated union of body and soul, created in the image and likeness of God as male or female. In a similar way, Catholic parishes and schools in the Archdiocese of Detroit have always borne the responsibility to promote these and other truths of our Catholic faith. However, in this time of great cultural confusion, it is necessary to state with clarity and charity how Catholic parishes and schools in the Archdiocese of Detroit will provide ministry that is conducted in the spirit of true compassion and oriented toward human flourishing.

These policies are designed for use together; an approach to ministry that only espouses one policy at the expense of the other misunderstands the instruction contained in the pastoral letter. Accordingly, these policies should be read and considered in light of the pastoral letter, most particularly in light of the singular truth that “those who struggle with gender confusion are our brothers and sisters...sons and daughters of God and beloved members of our communities.”

1. Grounded in the Church’s commitment to care pastorally for individuals struggling with gender confusion, all ministers of the Church in the Archdiocese of Detroit (clergy, employees, and volunteers) are expected to accompany these brothers and sisters with true compassion¹ and to assure them of God’s personal love².
2. By virtue of each person’s creation in the image and likeness of God as male or female³, and the truth that God’s plan for our holiness and flourishing is revealed through our bodies⁴, all ministers of the Church in the Archdiocese of Detroit (clergy, employees, and volunteers), students, and registered youth program participants shall respect their God-given biological sex regarding (but not limited to) the use of personal pronouns, dress code, bathrooms, and all other facilities. All documents and records shall reflect the person's God-given biological sex.

¹ “The Good News About God’s Plan: A Pastoral Letter on the Challenges of Gender Identity”, page 13

² Ibid, page 13

³ Ibid, page 5

⁴ Ibid, page 6



The Good News About God's Plan: A Pastoral Letter on the Challenges of Gender Identity

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a pastoral letter?

Bishops are first and foremost pastors. Their primary duty is to shepherd the faithful toward a closer relationship with Jesus Christ. One of the primary ways in which they do this is by publishing letters and teachings on some aspect of the faith. Just as the Holy Father writes letters to the bishops, clergy, and faithful of the worldwide Church, a local bishop periodically writes letters to his priests and the faithful of his diocese.

Archbishop Allen Vigneron has released five pastoral letters during his time as ordinary in the Archdiocese of Detroit:

[Forward in Hope to Share Christ](#) (2012)

[In Union With Christ's Dying and Rising](#) (2013)

[The Preacher: Servant of the Word of God](#) (2015)

[Unleash the Gospel](#) (2017)

[The Good News About God's Plan](#) (2024)

These are separate from [pastoral notes](#), a series of shorter teachings by Archbishop Vigneron released in recent years and expanding upon the Spirit-led insight found in the pastoral letter *Unleash the Gospel*.

2. Why did Archbishop Vigneron decide to write on the topic of gender identity?

As chief shepherd of the faithful in the Archdiocese of Detroit, Archbishop Vigneron shares the concerns and challenges that the faithful face within their families and our modern culture. Among the most pressing challenges, according to Archbishop Vigneron, “is how to rightly understand the human person according to God’s plan,” particularly when it comes to questions of gender identity and biological sex. In this time of great confusion in our culture, Archbishop Vigneron considered it necessary to state with clarity how parishes and schools in the Archdiocese of Detroit will live the truth of who we are and what the Church teaches on these matters. The result is his new pastoral letter and accompanying policies, both promulgated in the spirit of speaking truth in charity, seeking to present the mind of the Church on these matters with compassion and understanding for those receiving it, particularly those who have personal experience with the challenges of gender identity.

3. Who is the intended audience of this pastoral letter?

UNLEASH THE GOSPEL

The pastoral letter was written primarily for members of the faithful who assist in leading our parishes and schools, as well as parents of children who experience distress about their bodies or confusion about their gender. However, all the faithful are encouraged to read the letter and allow the mind of Christ and his Church to form their thinking on this issue.

4. What does the pastoral letter say about Church teaching on gender and gender identity?

The Catholic Church recognizes the human person as an integrated union of body and soul, created in God's image. In his pastoral letter, Archbishop Vigneron wrote that "God made humanity male and female not merely as incidentally different humans, but as two sexes who equally show forth God's image in their difference and in their complementarity." He likens this to a "unitive anthropology, or an understanding of the 'person as a whole.'" He goes on to explain, "We are not disjointed, with a separation between our bodies and our identities. Rather, our bodies reveal to us and to others key aspects to understanding who we are."

This established teaching is very different than the view promoted by much of modern society in which the human person is inherently divided between body and soul. This "dualist" view regards the body as a vessel or instrument to be used by the person; it has no inherent value and can thus be manipulated to align with one's "chosen gender." Archbishop Vigneron notes that this "notion of dividing a person between body and soul – or between mind and matter – is something that Christians have been combatting since the early centuries of the Church."

5. What is gender dysphoria and gender confusion?

The term "gender dysphoria" is a diagnosis for the distress one may feel due to a perceived disparity between his or her personal sense of gender and biological sex. "Dysphoria" comes from the Greek words for "hard to bear" and is the opposite of the more common word "euphoria." Prior to 2013, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5) used the term "Gender Identity Disorder" for this particular condition.

In Archbishop Vigneron's pastoral letter, he uses the broader term "gender confusion" to include everyone who experiences such a disparity, whether or not it results in distress or dysphoria.

6. How should Catholics relate to people experiencing gender confusion?

People experiencing gender confusion deserve our love, compassion, and support. As Archbishop Vigneron wrote in his pastoral letter, these individuals "are our brothers and sisters. They are sons and daughters of God and beloved members of our communities, never to be condemned nor rejected, but rather welcomed and accompanied on the path to the light of truth."

The faithful are called to "be especially cautious in making judgments about the culpability of those who are in such acute pain from gender confusion," Archbishop Vigneron wrote. Meanwhile, "Christ's revelation about the human person demands that we speak with clarity and charity about the moral law to help our brothers and sisters find the fullness of human flourishing that Christ desires for them."

Policy FAQs

1. What are the new policies?

Two new policies issued with Archbishop Vigneron's pastoral letter serve to codify the expectation for parishes and schools in the Archdiocese of Detroit to accompany people with true compassion while upholding the beautiful truth of creation:

Policy 1: "Grounded in the Church's commitment to care pastorally for individuals struggling with gender confusion, all ministers of the Church in the Archdiocese of Detroit (clergy, employees, and volunteers) are expected to accompany these brothers and sisters with true compassion and to assure them of God's personal love."

Policy 2: "By virtue of each person's creation in the image and likeness of God as male or female, and the truth that God's plan for our holiness and flourishing is revealed through our bodies, all ministers of the Church in the Archdiocese of Detroit (clergy, employees, and volunteers), students, and registered youth program participants shall respect their God-given biological sex regarding (but not limited to) the use of personal pronouns, dress code, bathrooms, and all other facilities. All documents and records shall reflect the person's God-given biological sex."

2. To whom do these new policies apply?

These policies apply to all Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Detroit (parochial, regional, and independent/religious order) and parish programs involving registered youth participants – such as parish religious education programs, youth conferences, and other special events.

3. When will the policies go into effect?

The policies themselves will go into effect Aug. 1, 2024, in time for the 2024-2025 academic school year. However, it is important to note that the Church has always recognized the human person as an integrated union of body and soul, created in the image and likeness of God as male or female; and in a similar way, Catholic ministries in the Archdiocese of Detroit have always borne the responsibility to uphold this and other truths of our Catholic faith. The pastoral letter and accompanying policies have codified existing values applicable to Catholic institutions.

4. How were the policies created?

Creating these policies has been an intentional process involving many key constituents. At Archbishop Vigneron's request, a task force was assembled consisting of priests, elementary and high school leaders, youth ministry leaders, and a mental health counselor. This committee reviewed published policies on gender and gender identity from arch/dioceses nationwide, formulated proposed policies, solicited feedback from various Archdiocesan leadership councils, school and parish leaders, parents of children experiencing gender confusion, and priests. They then revised the policies to incorporate the feedback received. Per Canon (Church) law, the policies were then presented to, reviewed, and approved by the Presbyterial Council and, ultimately, Archbishop Vigneron.

5. What happens if someone in a parish program or school community identifies as transgender?

As part of establishing these policies, the Archdiocese of Detroit will provide training to parish, school, and other ministry leadership to help them share these teachings and policies in their communities. This training will include guidance on pastoral accompaniment to individuals and families impacted by gender confusion, including the shared discernment about whether a given parish, school, or other ministry is able to meet the unique needs of an individual. As stated in Policy 1, all such discussions will be conducted with true compassion, helping people understand the harm in rejecting God's design, and assurances of God's personal love for those involved.

In all situations, it is critical to remember that, as Archbishop Vigneron wrote in his pastoral letter, people experiencing gender confusion "are our brothers and sisters. They are sons and daughters of God and beloved members of our communities, never to be condemned nor rejected, but rather welcomed and accompanied on the path to the light of truth." This means that while we proclaim "the good of the human body" and its unity with the soul, we do so with loving accompaniment. "We in the Archdiocese of Detroit commit ourselves to listen, to show compassion, to share the truth, and to celebrate the fullness of our shared call to holiness. Our commitment to be Jesus's joyful missionary disciples demands nothing less!"

6. Do the policies apply to adults participating in parish programs such as OCIA or Alpha?

Individuals experiencing gender confusion are not automatically excluded from participating in parish programs such as The Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA, formerly RCIA) or Alpha, a course that provides an opportunity for an encounter with Christ and introduces the basics of the Christian faith through a series of talks and discussions. Instead, parish priests can use their pastoral judgement to discern how each individual's unique situation should be addressed, always keeping in mind Archbishop Vigneron's call for our communities to welcome our brothers and sisters who experience gender confusion and accompany them on the path to the light of truth. An individual's regular attendance in such programs is an opportunity for a pastoral conversation, loving accompaniment, and ultimate conversion.

7. Where can parents go for additional information, resources, or support for a child struggling with gender confusion?

As stated above, the Archdiocese of Detroit will be providing training to parish, school, and other ministry leadership to help them share these teachings and policies in their communities. Importantly, this training will also include guidance on pastoral accompaniment to individuals and families impacted by gender confusion. This means that our parish and school leaders will be newly equipped to provide additional information, resources, and support to families navigating issues related to gender confusion. Families are invited to start by engaging their parish priest and their child(ren)'s Catholic school leadership, if applicable. They should expect to be welcomed into these pastoral conversations with loving accompaniment and without condemnation or judgement.

Families may also seek support through their local chapter of EnCourage, a support group dedicated to the spiritual needs of parents, siblings, children, and other relatives and friends of persons who

experience gender confusion and/or same-sex attraction. EnCourage members support one another and their loved ones through discussion, prayer, and fellowship under the guidance of a priest chaplain. To learn more, please contact (313) 237-5900 or encourage@aod.org. All inquiries are strictly confidential.