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by NCR Staff

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[The Milwaukee Archdiocese recently issued](#) a new policy aimed at persons who do not identify with their biological sex, stipulating that parishes, schools and other Catholic organizations must require people to use bathrooms associated with their birth gender.

If or when my brother's daughter, Joan, comes to visit from out of state, I will invite her to join us at our regular Saturday night Mass at my parish, Our Lady of Lourdes. I will introduce her as my niece to my friends and our parish staff. I will point out the location of the women's restroom. I will hope that she will find the same rich source of support for growing in love of God and neighbor as I've found there. I will do all this because our parish says, "All are welcome to come as they are and to serve."

Unfortunately, our archdiocese would ask me to act differently since Joan is transgender. According to the recently issued "Catechesis and Policy on Questions Concerning Gender Theory," I should not use Joan's preferred pronouns — she/her/hers — but should use he/him/his when referring to her. I should direct her to the men's restroom. If our parish had a dress code, I should ask her not to wear the tunics or skirts she likes, and if we sponsored a women's volleyball team, I should ask her not to participate. The last policy in the guidelines states that Joan and her parents, and I, should be directed to "appropriate" ministers and counselors. That policy is titled "Protecting the Vulnerable."



Joan has been vulnerable. The journey to becoming herself has, I think, been long and challenging. She is a private person, so hasn't shared many of her struggles. However, I have seen her hurt when we family inadvertently used the wrong pronouns when she first started to transition. To her I think it felt like we didn't support and love her when the old pronoun slipped out. I was privileged to stay with her when she had facial feminization surgery several years ago. She was willing to go through surgery and a face wrapped in bandages to look more like herself. She didn't ask to be transgender, but she has bravely grown into a strong woman.

So, when I saw the NCR article on the archdiocese's new policy, I was very sad. Once again, I am struggling to reconcile church statements with the vibrant prayerful community I am a member of. Once again, I wonder if I can balance the tension this policy brings to me with my belief that I am called to be Catholic. Once again, I am at a loss as to how I could encourage any of my nieces and nephews to join me at my church. My answer is to stay, but to introduce Joan as Joan.

ANITA EIKENS

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Milwaukee Archdiocese's transgender policy is absolutely callous and insensitive. Dialogue is probably beneath their leadership but dismissing this community under the guise of the Gospel is insulting.

JOHN J. PETILLO

Fairfield, Connecticut

I weep in shame and anger to once again be reminded that the Catholic Church I grew up in has arrived at such total loss of love and compassion.

MARY ROSE NICHOLS

Albuquerque, New Mexico

Now it's the church's job to tell people what to use when referring to themselves? What's next, no more gender-neutral names at baptism? Goodbye Kelly? Jaime? Will my poor Uncle Clare be disinterred from consecrated ground?

There are a whole lot of pins just waiting for their angel population to be counted and there are folks in Milwaukee who are up for the task.

TOM HAYES

East Setauket, New York

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This is another saddening and distressing incident of a complete lack of pastoral sensitivity. I agree wholeheartedly with New Ways Ministry executive director Francis DeBernardo who states that the guidelines the bishop of Milwaukee recently released "show no concern for a human person."

A broader concern is this: when are we going to stop using a myth, the story of Adam and Eve, to explain personhood and gender? We no longer talk about a dome that separates the water of the earth from that of the heavens, and do not suggest that the universe was created in six 24-hour periods. Science has shown us any one "day" in creation may have been millions of our years.

We cannot discard the real experience of real human persons for we believe in the truth of the incarnation. All we now know through experience and scientific study is revealing much more than ancient writers could have ever imagined about the realities of who we are as human beings, each one of us created by God in all our beautiful complexity.

CATHY JOHNSON

Cherry Hill, New Jersey

With regard to the Milwaukee archdiocese's attitude toward sexual orientation, I can only ask: "What bathroom would Jesus use?"

BILL BIRDSALL

Ann Arbor, Michigan

I was saddened to read of the new policy issued by Archbishop Jerome ListECKI. It, like those recently introduced in other archdioceses and dioceses, will only serve to create a new class of Holy Innocents — innocent children mercilessly persecuted by unjust policies implemented by religious zealots in the name of Christ.

I can speak firsthand about the negative fallout of these policies, which pretty much mirror one another. As pastor of an online Catholic mission to the transgender community, I have been contacted by adult transgender Catholics from both the Arlington and Marquette dioceses over these policies. These faithful Catholics have been ostracized by the church and basically kicked to the curb. My advice to them has been to follow the teachings of Christ who told disciples that when they encounter a place where they are not welcome, that they should shake the dirt from their feet and move on. Adult transgender people are able to simply leave Roman Catholic Churches and seek independent Catholic churches that are open and affirming — churches such as the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America, the Old Catholic Church of America, or the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, to name a few.

But the plight of transgender youth is of grave concern. Statistics show that more than half of transgender youth are rejected by their own families. Their despair is only magnified when their schools and churches take a hardball position against them. It is no wonder that the attempted suicide rate stands at more than 40% for the transgender community. Christ teaches that we are to love one another. Churches that adopt blanket policies that exclude or persecute people — especially those who are innocent and vulnerable, such as youth — have gotten their theology all wrong.

Any transgender people wishing to live their authentic life while practicing their authentic faith are welcome to do so in many independent Catholic churches.

(Pastor) GRACE WILGEFORTIS FERRIS

Glenville, New York

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