

“COURAGE” MINISTRY

Article 79 February 2014

Brendan Scarce

Courage and the New Evangelization: Part Two

Introduction

The best support for a person with same sex attraction is having a friend / mentor / confidante / ongoing spiritual direction...

Preliminary considerations I notice for the same sex attracted who want to live according to the Church’s teaching

1. The scourge of isolation, loneliness, the pain of being labelled, being named and the fear of being targeted.
2. The mind set has to be renewed. (St Paul relevant here in Romans 12:2). Quite a number of men who are living a chaste life have done their reading about same sex attraction and access spiritual resources.
3. Hope: At a National Charismatic Conference of 250-300 people I stated among other things and boldly “that there is a place in the Church for those with same-sex attraction”. This is a mantra call that could be repeated by Courage in the New Evangelization.

Ongoing pastoral issues and concerns: Some suggestions

Some Catholics, who want to be seen to be fair and compassionate to those with same-sex attraction, hold the distorted opinion that the Church believes that same-sex attracted people have to change orientation. I have had this query so often by excellent practising Catholics. The Courage ministry does not demand an orientation change. I do know men and women who have worked on being attracted to the opposite sex. One has married, another has proposed to a woman, and another is wanting to be married to a woman and has shared many of his disappointments about this to me. For many, there appears to be a permanent wound that can be opened up again by extreme circumstances.

A question I sometimes ask the same-sex attracted person who is seeking a partner or is pining for one; “Is your current relationship wholesome for you?”

Question Three: How do we affirm the place of (homosexual) same-sex attracted people in the Church?

1. The local Church - the parish.

In the congregation there will be a number of unemployed, retired, pensioners, single women, widows, divorced, single parents. **Do we want to foist upon the congregation a group according to a label?** Are we perpetuating the label by nominating them as a separate group according to orientation, and not seeing them as persons within the broader group of the worshipping people of God? Those I know who want to be and are practising Catholics do not want to be seen as 'homosexual'. Here is the rub, if we say that we ought to affirm the place of same-sex attracted men and women in the Church

The role of service among the People of God

We can affirm any person within the congregation as part of the "People of God" as being called and humbly offering to use their talents to serve. Their particular talent and enthusiasm can be utilized in liturgical planning, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, Care and Concern groups, the RCIA programme, other forms of catechesis, choir, collection, visitation of the elderly, reading and being ministers of the Eucharist. If the same-sex attracted person has been consistent in attending the one local parish, I would, as a mentor, encourage him or her to appreciate that they can have a role. Sometimes, by mentioning the obvious, people are motivated. One of our current Courage members is a permanent reader for a Sunday congregation and he takes the role very seriously. That is very good news! And he has not revealed that he is same-sex attracted. Are we being seduced into making a new class of people in the Church?

A discreet and discerning Pastor

How beautiful it is when a person in authority invites us to serve. If the Parish priest, or Associate priest, might know of the presence of same-sex attracted persons within the congregation, he may be able to find a discreet way of including the same-sex attracted person in an appropriate lay pastoral ministry.

2. The Archdiocesan Church – and the New Evangelization

The Archdiocesan Pastoral Life Ministry or Office ought to employ or utilize the gifts and talents of an animator for the spiritual, emotional, social life and welfare considerations of same-sex attracted persons. In this regard I am inspired by the example of the marvellous ministry of Edel Quinn, the extraordinary Legion of Mary envoy for Africa.

The Media Office of the Archdiocese ought also to promote the work of those Catholic groups that unambiguously follow the teachings of the Catholic Church. The CDF document, the appropriate clauses in the Catholic Catechism and other appropriate material ought to be disseminated as useful information for the clergy and the People of God. There could be an official diocesan media campaign for a couple of weeks or a three month period detailing the Church's long history of ministries in various fields, and that could include a month about same-sex attraction ministry. Recently, in Australia, we have had the Year of Grace, the pilgrimage of St Francis

Xavier's relic and the very well received canonization of Saint Mary MacKillop. In a brave New Evangelization initiative of the Australian Bishops Conference I would like to suggest a declaration of "A Year of Hope" for the Australian Church and obviously the same-sex ministry would be one sign of hope.

Appropriate education and formation for the clergy

The promotion and support of a Courage and Encourage group within Archdioceses / dioceses should be recommended. The appointment of at least two priests as chaplains would be beneficial. It is not good for one man to have this responsibility alone. Proverbs 18:19 "Brothers united are a strong city." I think that it is time for the Australian Church to sponsor a National Conference / National Seminar on the issues I have mentioned in articles 78 and 79. Let Courage present its findings at a local seminary and invite seminary formators and designated key people to tease out a pastoral plan for the whole country. A number of Courage men have expressed concern about the lack of sound pastoral advice in the confessional.

Matters to address when suggesting a place for the same-sex attracted people in the Church?

1. Because we might be unwittingly building a sub-class or special class among the People of God by giving a special status to the same-sex attracted, I wonder if this subliminally perpetuates the wound of same-sex attraction. The Church is a refuge, an oasis, a sacred place for any of us to be in communion with the Trinity.
2. We do need to provide sound pastoral wisdom in how to deal with the tsunami of information about same-sex attraction.
3. All of us must slough off whatever baggage interferes with our deepening relationship and prayer life with God. Wearing the apparel of being a same-sex attracted person in the Church is a garment that most of the men and women that I have seen, do not want to wear.
4. The world in general and the media seem to encourage the belief that the Church hates same-sex attracted persons. It is not uncommon to hear good people suggest or believe that the Church hates the same-sex attracted. This tendency or myth has to be confronted for the good of those entire in ministry and for those who seek the help of the Church. When this is done the Church would be seen as a safe place to come and be helped.

Support for parents and families of the same- sex attracted

Like any ministry to people in need, we need to present the compassion and love of Jesus. We need to be welcoming, listening solicitously, compassionately, wisely and well, comforting and sharing our experiences of how we have helped others. The families need to feel, if not accept, that they are consulting a person who has some knowledge and practical suggestions. I think the most important fact about support is that there is a Catholic person listening who holds to the traditional teaching and the gospel values about sexuality. This can be an oasis for some who seem to have accessed a significant amount of material from the internet, which is inimical. To

have someone confidently speak about Church teaching and prayer life is a welcome relief for many a parent. Of course the degree of success of helping is predicated on the non-judgemental attitude of the helper.

Conclusion

I see the issue of same-sex attraction as an element of sexuality and it is not the totality of sexuality. Hence, the New Evangelization apostolic effort ought to fashion any teachings or moral concepts about same-sex attraction within the broader framework of human sexuality. We must not give the issue of same-sex attraction an importance out of all proportion to its due. Let the Evangelization be precise, exact and truthful.

Courage is a ministry of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane.
For further information contact: Telephone (07) 3865 2464 – Brendan Scarce,
Michael Curtin 041 118 0264 Email: Brisbanecourage@bigpond.com