How do Catholic schools best serve students who struggle with same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria (popularly called “transgendered”)? What should a school’s policies prescribe in order to prevent confusion, disputes and even litigation?

Previously, these questions were often addressed behind closed doors, as administrators worked quietly on a case-by-case basis and often within traditional moral norms. However, since this past summer’s Supreme Court ruling supporting same-sex marriage and the social acceptance of superstar Bruce Jenner’s gender dysphoria, Catholic schools face an increasingly public challenge to their teaching and mission.

This dynamic became painfully evident in the recent decision by a Rhode Island Catholic school¹, which ignited a national firestorm by refusing to admit transgendered students and then was pressured to reverse its policy within just a couple of days. The correct instinct that a Catholic school cannot accommodate willful gender confusion gave rise to a weak position statement, holding that transgendered students could not be admitted due to a lack of facilities to

¹ http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/03/04/catholic-prep-school-no-transgender-students.html
accommodate them. Activists seized upon the opportunity and offered to “crowd source” the necessary facilities, forcing the school to reverse its policy of strict exclusion.

While some Catholic school leaders might be persuaded to avoid this thorny issue, or to embrace a false compassion that is inconsistent with Catholic teaching, instead the Rhode Island school’s misstep highlights the grave necessity of a more comprehensive policy approach to sexuality in Catholic schools. Catholic schools must bravely serve all students, including same-sex attracted or gender dysphoric students, by forthrightly presenting and upholding truth. That’s why—in addition to the excellent resources for Christians already available from Alliance Defending Freedom⁵, The Heritage Foundation⁶ and the Liberty⁷—The Cardinal Newman Society has released a new handbook of Human Sexuality Policies for Catholic Schools⁵ to help Catholic educators with specific exemplars and language tied to their Catholic mission.

Working with students who have these sexual inclinations is complex, especially since a Catholic school is called to serve everyone who has the capability and desire to partake in its mission. It must also be clear that all students are expected to follow the same school policies, and not work against the school’s mission, or its moral and religious standards and ends.

A Catholic school which clearly articulates the faith in these matters is bound to make some enemies in the common culture, and even possibly to be threatened with legal action. But Catholic educators must never compromise the faith, or the authentic good of their students, for fear of public ridicule or potential litigation. In fact, it is precisely a deeply felt and lived Catholicism, rooted in an authentic love for all students, which is the best protection against litigation. The more clearly and comprehensively a Catholic school articulates its unique religious mission and identity, and the more securely it anchors its policies for all students in this mission, the more protected it is from potential litigation. Such a comprehensive, mission-based approach ensures that students struggling with issues of human sexuality or gender dysphoria are not singled out for different treatment, but rather are held to the same faith-based standards as all students in the school.

**Know Thyself**

Since it is critical that Catholic schools ensure that all policies are consistent with their Catholic mission, they need to clearly articulate that mission. Pope Pius XI⁸ describes the purpose of Catholic education as “securing the Supreme Good, that is, God, for the souls of those who are being educated, and the maximum of well-being possible here below for human society.”

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² http://www.afa.net/pdfs/sogi-handbook.pdf
³ http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2015/11/protecting-your-right-to-serve-how-religious-ministries-can-meet-new-challenges-without-changing-their-witness
⁴ https://www.libertyinstitute.org/school-religious-liberty-audits%20Institute
⁶ http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_31121929_divini-illius-magistri.html
Expanding upon this, the Church’s Code of Canon Law #795\(^7\) sums up the mission of Catholic education this way:

> Since true education must strive for complete formation of the human person that looks to his or her final end, as well as to the common good of societies, children and youth are to be nurtured in such a way that they are able to develop their physical, moral, and intellectual talents harmoniously, acquire a more perfect sense of responsibility and right use of freedom, and are formed to participate actively in social life.

The final end for which Catholic schools prepare their students is union with God through Christ. A Catholic school also facilitates students’ participation in the common good. Both goals are accomplished by integrally and harmoniously developing the students’ minds, spirits, morals, and bodies so that they might use their freedom properly. What is proper or good as a means of attaining our final end of salvation is always understood in terms of Church teaching, based on the person and truth of Jesus Christ.

This is what Catholic schools do. This is who we are. This is what we offer.

Those who do not want to receive what we offer are free to go wherever they want to find what they think they need. We are not required to change our standards to meet the needs of those who reject all or part of our efforts, especially if changing our standards works contrary to our mission. Those students or families who only want to benefit from a part of the mission, such as our intellectual formation, must still participate with goodwill in the full program.

This program includes formation of the whole human person. We cannot disaggregate our efforts or offer our formation \textit{a la carte}, because: “In the Catholic school’s educational project, there is no separation between time for learning and time for formation, between acquiring notions and growing in wisdom,” according to the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education\(^8\). The Congregation also emphasizes\(^9\) that everything in a Catholic school is \textit{Catholic}, and the faith is \textit{everywhere}:

> What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its religious dimension, and that this is to be found in a) the educational climate, b) the personal development of each student, c) the relationship established between culture and the Gospel, d) the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith.

\(^7\) http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P2M.HTM
A student or family may not like every part of the complete educational project, but they should be expected to participate in the complete mission, to the fullest extent possible for their state of life, and never do anything that works against the mission, or protests it. Surely those whose religious practices and beliefs run counter to Church teaching might experience conflicts as the school maintains mission integrity. Sincere questioning of the practices and traditions of the Catholic faith, in order to more deeply understand them, ought to be welcome, but openly hostile and public defiance of Catholic truths or morality are signs that a student may not be a good fit for a Catholic school’s primary evangelical mission and, therefore, may be denied admission.

All students should be welcome in our schools, including those working through issues of gender dysphoria and same-sex attraction, but all students must be willing to work within the religious mission of the school, and comport themselves according to the social and moral norms of the distinctive Catholic environment they have freely chosen.

Love One Another

A Catholic school always interacts with others in an attitude of deep respect. This respect is based on the essential human dignity of each person, who is made in the image and likeness of God. There is no room in a Catholic school for hatred, injustice, or a lack of charity or compassion. It is also true that while all people have an inherent dignity and fundamental freedom that must be respected, one need not have inherent respect for all that people do. Respect for particular human behaviors must depend on how completely they fulfill the proper nature of humanity as created by God.

Those who experience challenges in the proper exercise of their sexuality can be respected as members of the human family, and yet still be challenged in behavior which the Church considers as not fulfilling its proper nature. Catholic schools are places to clarify and distinguish between error and truth, sin and virtue, order and disorder, according to reason, natural law, revelation, and Church teaching. Catholic schools make no secret about what the Church teaches regarding human sexuality. We cannot compromise that teaching by looking the other way when one is in serious error, and we cannot allow for the advocacy of error in our hallways. We do this in humility to the truth, and out of love for others.

Respect and love can only transpire in the truth. Love entails seeking the authentic good of the other. A simple definition of “good” is when a thing well-fulfills its potentialities and purposes. Love, then, involves assisting another to fulfill their full human potentiality as created and loved by God.

While many groups differ as to what exactly constitutes human good, the purpose of a Catholic school is to address these issues from a distinctly Catholic perspective, and within a deeply felt and lived Catholic culture. When this dynamic is focused on issues related to human sexuality, it is clear that the Catholic Church has a distinct and defined theology regarding the potentialities
and purposes of human sexuality. The Catholic school must ensure that these are presented, even in the face of a hostile common culture, with conviction, integrity, and charity. A school’s pastoral, and policy practices must be written in fidelity to the moral guidance and teachings of the Catholic Church in all areas that touch on human nature, including issues related to human sexuality.

We situate this teaching in the conviction that the mission of a Catholic school includes the integral formation of the whole person: body, mind, and spirit. The whole person includes the student’s attitudes, dispositions, and behaviors, of which the very complex area of human sexuality is a part. As a Catholic institution, we believe that our bodies are gifts from God, and temples of the Holy Spirit. We believe that human sexual behavior is only properly oriented to the ends of love and life in the context of a sacramental marriage. We believe that the body and soul are intimately united: the body does not contain the soul, like water in a glass, but rather holistically and naturally expresses who we are in the order of creation as physical/spiritual beings.

We believe that the sexes are complementary, and that “male and female he made us.” Our given biological sex is part of the divine plan. The Church teaches\(^\text{10}\) that sexual identity is “a reality deeply inscribed in man and woman” that is rooted in one’s biological identity, and that a person “should acknowledge and accept\(^\text{11}\) his sexual identity.” Biological identity and sexual identity are never disaggregated\(^\text{12}\). Both are gifts from God for us to perfect and bring into harmony according to his plan and guidance. They are not ours to reject, or to change outside of their proper functioning at our own will, because we believe God has made a mistake which we must correct.

Catholic schools understand truth to be the state in which the mind is in conformity with reality: a reality which entails the fullness of God’s creation and divine plan. We also affirm that reality is knowable through the use of properly functioning senses and reason, as well as through the aid of divine revelation.

In this context, a student who wishes to express a gender other than his or her biological sex is understood as operating outside of the “reality deeply inscribed” within. Assisting the child in his or her disconnect with this reality—however sincerely experienced—by agreeing to participate in the child’s efforts to change gender expression, is contrary to the pursuit of the truth. Authentic love, a gift of the self for the good of the other, requires that we compassionately dwell in the truth, and assist those we love to do the same. We will lovingly accompany the student through the inherent challenges of this situation, but in the fullness of love, must also

\(^{10}\)http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040731_collaborati on_en.html
\(^{11}\)http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/para/2333.htm
insist upon integrity between reality and comportment for the good of the child, and for the
common good.

In a similar vein, we love and respect all of our students, but Catholic schools cannot condone or
respect unchaste or disordered sexual activity. Every member of our school is called to a life of
holiness, and that holiness includes living a chaste life appropriate to one’s vocation, whether as
single, married, or consecrated religious. The Church defines chastity\(^\text{13}\) as the successful
integration of sexuality within the person and, thus, the inner unity of man in his bodily and
spiritual being: “The chaste person maintains the integrity of the powers of life and love placed
in him. This integrity ensures the unity of the person; it is opposed to any behavior that would
impair it. It tolerates neither a double life nor duplicity in speech.” Also, because the Catholic
Church teaches that same-sex attraction is intrinsically disordered\(^\text{14}\), and that sexual activity is
only appropriate for the purposes of love and life within sacramental marriage, those students
experiencing this disordered inclination may not advocate for it, or express it in the context of
our Catholic school classes, activities, or events. The Church encourages\(^\text{15}\) individuals
experiencing same-sex attraction to pursue the virtues of chastity, self-mastery, and friendship,
instead of acting upon those inclinations, romantically or sexually—as is the current norm in
much of secular society.

Authentic Good for All Students

Once properly situated in the broad context of a school’s Catholic mission, particular efforts to
work respectfully and holistically from within a Catholic context and culture with students
experiencing same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria can be better understood, and more clearly
articulated. Because the Church teaches that for all its students sexual activity is only properly
exercised toward the ends of both love and life in the context of a valid marriage, and because it
teaches that same-sex attraction is disordered, the school can and should prohibit actively
advocating for, or manifesting same-sex attraction, at school and school events. Similarly,
because a Catholic school does not disaggregate gender from biological sex, the school can
clarify that it accepts people with gender dysphoria, but still holds them accountable to all
policies and procedures (including dress code and facilities use) concordant with the student’s
biological sex.

Granted this is a complex and potential litigious topic, but Catholic schools must be willing to
secure the authentic good of their students, in season and out of season. If students and families
want to pursue a competing concept of the good, that is, of course, their right; but Catholic
schools do not need to provide, nor accommodate, a competing version of the good. It is our

\(^{13}\) http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P85.HTM
\(^{14}\) http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p3s2c2a6.htm
\(^{15}\) http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19751229_persona-
humana_en.html
right and our responsibility to live the truth with love in complete fidelity to Christ and his Church.

Our message of love and human flourishing must be faithful, pastoral, and clear. Our Catholic schools should be open to all who wish to join our mission of complete human formation of our students for their own salvation and good, and for the good of others.

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