Opinion
Guest Voices



An attendee at an LGBT pride parade in Bangalore, India, Nov. 20, 2016. (CNS/Jagadeesh Nv, EPA)

by Frank McKown

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> "Be who you were created to be, and you will set the world on fire."
> — St. Catherine of Siena

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Some time ago a priest friend posted the above quote on his Facebook page. The phrase was new to me but it struck me as a wonderful inspiration to anyone who feels downtrodden by others because of who they are. Quite instinctively, I applied St. Catherine's command to myself as a gay Catholic.

Believing that God created me as a gay man, I see that He creates all types of people, and not all of them are straight. While some believe that homosexuality is a choice or a decision brought about by circumstance, the church has recognized that for most gay and lesbian people, their same-sex attraction is a deep-seated orientation that is innate to their being.

Following medical and psychological advances in understanding the nature of homosexuality, in 1997 the church issued a landmark document, "Always Our Children," which brought a message to parents to be accepting of their children's gay or lesbian orientation. The document was the first pastoral approach on this sensitive topic and provided both parents and pastors guidance for loving and respecting children, regardless of their sexual orientation, and an invitation for gay and lesbian young people to continue their relationship with God and the church.

"Always Our Children," put out by the U.S. bishops, was seen as a vital first step in the church communicating that homosexuality exists within our families and is not just about outcast individuals with a disordered inclination. However, this more accepting recognition of homosexuality did not change the church's teaching that all sexual activity outside of marriage is morally wrong. Homosexual acts are forbidden. That said, your unmarried straight children are just as prone to do sexually immoral acts as your gay children. Indeed, we are all called to chastity.

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We have seen great changes in American society in the past 20 years since the U.S. bishops' letter came out. Today gay and lesbian service members can serve openly in our armed forces. Most corporations have employment protection policies which include sexual orientation. And same-sex couples may civilly marry in all 50 states. While a generation ago you might not have known a gay person, now it is likely that you have a relative or friends who are part of the LGBT community. If you don't, your

children certainly do.

But how has the church addressed these sweeping social changes? To be sure, the church has not changed its moral teachings on homosexual acts. While upholding the personal dignity of gay people and prohibiting any unjust discrimination, the church has strongly rejected same-sex unions, and has gone as far as dismissing church lay employees who support or practice a "gay lifestyle" contrary to Church teaching.

While we may agree or disagree with church teaching, with many gay Catholics choosing to live openly within our families and parishes, should we not welcome them as St. Catherine reminds us to be who we "were created to be"?

A year ago I spoke at a Los Angeles parish. The pastor and deacons wanted to appear as welcoming as possible to their flock, including to some gay and lesbian families who had recently started attending Mass. There was some lively discussion, including participation from two non-parishioners who came specifically to refute my message. With help from the pastor, I presented church teaching on homosexuality and Christ's central message of welcoming all to the table. The parish's mission statement is now a model of inclusion: "We are a welcoming Catholic community called by God to live out the message of Christ in love and service to all people."

However we come down on church teaching we are reminded that Jesus did not judge others because of who they were. Neither should we. With this conviction, let us set the world on fire.

[Frank McKown is the former co-chair of Catholic Ministry with Gay and Lesbian Persons for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.]

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