Opinion
Letters to the Editor

by NCR Staff

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Last summer, NCR staff reporter Katie Collins Scott contacted all episcopates with known policies on gender and sexuality to ask if LGBTQ people were consulted during the drafting process. Only about a third responded to her request — itself a sign of lack of transparency — and of those who did respond, only a handful said they had input from people with gender dysphoria, but were not willing to give more details about their dialogue or process. Scott also took a closer look at both the Portland Archdiocese and the Boston Archdiocese. Following are letters to the editor responding to our coverage and our corresponding editorial. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

The failure of the institutional church to welcome transgender and gender non-conforming people as they are into Catholic spaces is yet another instance of the church lagging behind secular people. What theological sense does this make? If the Holy Spirit has proven more operative outside of the Catholic Church on every major social/moral question for centuries, we have a real theological problem to address.

More importantly, it is absolutely necessary that the institutional church, especially clergy and religious, enter into compassionate dialogue with ordinary trans and gender non-conforming people who are just trying to live their lives. Special attention should be shown to the most marginalized members of the trans and gender non-conforming communities, such as those who are sex workers, unhoused, incarcerated or differently abled.

Frankly, I think that those are the voices and experiences that Catholic allies should highlight and center. Members of a narrow, privileged layer of the trans and gender non-conforming communities should not be in the forefront for worshippers of a God who became poor.

JEFFREY JONES
Hamburg, New York



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I wrote this letter to Portland Archbishop Alexander Sample.

I just finished reading "A Catholic Response to Gender Identity Theory: Catechesis and Pastoral Guidelines," released last week by your office.

Your document is seriously flawed in that it asserts that the policies and guidelines being advanced by your archdiocese express universal Catholic tradition and thought. They do not. They represent only conservative Roman Catholic entities such as yours.

Untold thousands of Catholics worldwide comprise the independent Catholic movement. Our churches are fully Catholic, but not Roman Catholic. We worship the same God as you. We proclaim the same Gospel as you. We celebrate the same sacraments as you. But where we differ from you is that we include and embrace all without restriction. We welcome those who no longer feel welcome in the Roman Catholic Church. We are not Roman Catholic, but we are Catholic.

To shed further clarity on the topic of gender identity theory and its impact on Roman Catholic institutions — since that seems to be the purpose of your publication — I respectfully request that you recall, edit, and reissue your document, replacing the term "Catholic" with the term "Roman Catholic" so that you are not misrepresenting your intent. I for one and most concerned that the general public might become confused and assume that all Catholic churches embrace the dangerous policies you have implemented.

(The Rev.) GRACE WILGEFORTIS FERRIS
Glenville, New York

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The hostile reaction of several American bishops to the gender dysphoria discussion now underway in the U.S. is embarrassing and scandalous.

There have always been transgender people. Bishops who tell trans children that it is sinful for them to attempt to resolve their trans issues medically, surgically or socially are themselves sinful.

The bishops' sins are (1) falsely claiming that God requires acquiescence to the original condition if you are born different, (2) forbidding attempts to get professional help or ask social acceptance as sinful both for the petitioner and for the medical, school or other personnel who offer such help and (3) failing to welcome "different" people as true children of God.

That is a lot of sin in my book. Saying, "God made you this way, tough it out" is so completely hostile and mean that it defies basic human decency better yet a Christian charity.

BOB MATTHEWS
Cincinnati, Ohio

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The salient point is this from transgender Catholic, Michael Sennett: "The most important thing is not policies but listening to these families, to these children."

That listening, that dialogue, would respect both human dignity and the truth of lived experience. These are the people who will be most deeply impacted by the

gender identity guidelines under consideration by the Boston Archdiocese committee charged with their development, and they deserve that much.

We are, after all, in a years-long process of synodality — accompaniment — in the Catholic Church, guided by Pope Francis, the pontiff who champions encounter, and who has met several times with groups of transgender people.

Yet the diocese can't commit to hearing from the most knowledgeable source of information about transgender lives — a transgender person — and the diocesan spokesperson offers up a statement that belies the committee's stance, calling the process "very thoughtful" and "very collaborative."

To listen to those from whom we differ models Jesus's inclusion and compassion. To ignore individuals about whom policy and teaching is created is disrespectful, unjust and exclusive. Especially when policy may be life-threatening for those affected.

To Michael Sennett for your advocacy and generosity of spirit: Thank you!

To NCR and Katie Collins Scott for bringing this to light: Thank you!

To all Catholic diocesan leaders whose actions and policies further marginalize our siblings in Christ: Do better!

ANNE KIEFER
Penn Yan, New York

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While reading the NCR article "Catholic dioceses release new gender policies," there was no mention of the 17-page document that Archbishop Samuel Aquila of Denver sent to the diocesan schools with explicit written guidance on the how to deal with the LGBTQ issues in the Catholic schools. Administrators were told "to not enroll or re-enroll transgender or gender non-conforming students, and that gay parents should be treated differently than heterosexual couples." "… Schools should not allow students to use pronouns "at odds with the student's biological sex." "Teachers who decide to transition are 'not suited to teach in a Catholic school …' "

In fact, a technology teacher at All Souls School was fired, after teaching there for six years, because it became known that she was in a same-sex relationship. And on Feb. 15, we learn that three women who wore rainbow-colored masks, to support the fired teacher, were denied Communion by the All Souls parish priest.

JANET JOHNSON
Golden, Colorado

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I read with interest the article regarding the diocese of Boston's attempt to create guidelines regarding care for those with gender dysphoria. In the piece by Katie Collins Scott, our organization, the American College of Pediatricians (ACPeds) is referred to and a link to one of our website pages is provided. On that particular site, one dedicated to families with LGBTQ questioning children, many resources are listed including some by respected and now deceased psychologist Joseph Nicolosi.

Nicolosi dealt with, among other mental health issues, persons with unwanted same-sex attraction, attraction that is now understood to, in many cases, be more fluid than originally thought. Though understandably controversial and often silenced, these stories and the involved therapy give hope to some who struggle with what the Catholic Church recognizes as "intrinsically disordered" desires.

The archdiocese of Boston would do well to note that many countries and medical societies are similarly recognizing that such treatment is not in the best interest of children who struggle with gender dysphoria that is safely and more effectively dealt with using intensive counseling and psychotherapy.

(Dr.) MICHAEL ARTIGUES, president of American College of Pediatricians
Sharpsburg, Georgia