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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Sadly, in the recent debate about homosexual marriage, many homosexual people – along with their parents, family members and friends - have been hurt by what they have been told is Catholic teaching on homosexual people. Catholic teaching on the dignity of homosexual people is one thing: Catholic teaching on marriage is another.

At one level, it is understandable unfortunately that the two have become confused – particularly as a result of media misunderstanding; the expressed views of Catholics who do not follow Catholic teaching; and the insensitivity of some Catholics during the recent debate. Many of you – like me – have been asked questions by family members of people who are homosexual.

Catholic teachings

I offer the following – which really is no different from Catholic teaching on how all people should be loved. Catholics are called to love those of homosexual orientation, for they

- are loved completely and unconditionally by God
- share the same human dignity as all other human beings
- are human persons with gifts from God, and should never be categorised simply by their sexual orientation
- are entitled to the same respect as everyone else
- must never be treated unjustly.

Jesus died on the cross for the salvation of all people, including those of homosexual orientation. He calls them to experience him, his guidance and his power in their daily lives as members of his Body, the Church.

Every parish needs to reach out and to welcome its homosexual brothers and sisters. They should not be treated any differently from other parishioners.

Homosexual people, like everyone else, are called to live all of God's commandments as Jesus taught them. Many live the chaste life style no less than others.

Some find the Sixth Commandment difficult to live, as do many who are not homosexual. The Church calls all to seek the power Jesus offers, particularly through the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to help them live God's Commandments and seek God's forgiveness.

What are our personal attitudes?

There has been prejudice against homosexual people across society for centuries. I invite Catholics to ask themselves: 'Does my attitude towards those of homosexual orientation reflect my Catholic faith or negative social attitudes?' 'How do I behave or speak to or about homosexual people?'

The issue of same-sex marriage has been about whether the name for one institution should be used for two distinctive relationships. Australian society has now decided this question. Unfortunately, Catholic teaching on marriage has been presented insensitively at times and left some homosexual people now feeling wounded. This should be a cause of sorrow for us all.

Let us reach out ...

In conclusion, let us do all that we can to reach out and make homosexual people welcome in our parishes. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Bishop Gerard Holohan

18th November 2017