



**STATEMENT OF
THE CONFERENCE OF MAJOR SUPERIORS OF MEN,
ON THE RECENT INSTRUCTION FROM THE CONGREGATION FOR
CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

November 29, 2005

Consistent with the Tradition of the Church, the Congregation for Catholic Education has put forth an *Instruction* to aid in the vocational discernment for persons with homosexual tendencies in view of their admission to seminaries and Holy Orders. The Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), having read the *Instruction*, understands and supports the need for such norms for integrated healthy affective maturity which comes at a time of much confusion and many misunderstandings about the totality of human sexuality and its proper role in relationships. This confusion often times leads to doubt about the value and intrinsic worth of chaste celibate commitment in response to a religious priestly vocation.

It is important to remind all of us that a religious vocation, including one to the priesthood, is indeed an invitation by God to commit oneself to an evangelical way of life. A genuine call from God is also accompanied by God's grace so that a person may flourish in a vowed commitment to poverty, obedience and chastity for the sake of the kingdom of God. By their vows, religious commit themselves to a chaste loving that is not affirmed by many in today's society. The choice in which chaste celibacy is held as a virtue and a value is a counter cultural sign with many challenges and sacrifices, yet still possessing great potential and promise.

The *Instruction* is a reminder to all of us, not only for persons with a homosexual inclination, that the goal of formation for priesthood in its human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral aspects is to guide persons to fully live out their vocation in affective maturity. A life marked by behavior that is not consistent with the evangelical counsels of poverty, obedience and chastity should cause the religious seminarian, and those charged with his formation, to seriously discern whether the individual truly has a vocation to religious life and / or priesthood. If the vocation is not authentic, the person will indeed never be happy and be a cause of future tension for others. At the same time, those who have taken hold of the grace of their vocation, regardless of their sexual inclination, have become concrete examples of Christ to men and women through their ministries and presence.

Ultimately, religious priesthood is about integration and transformation through the Paschal Mystery, in union with Jesus Christ. In this relationship, religious share a common call to the fullness of being generous, joy-filled, generative men who are in love with Christ, possessing a profound faith-filled relationship with him.

God's call to serve the Church as vowed members of a religious congregation is properly discerned in a dialogical format involving the internal and external forum. The expressed goal of the dialogue is to assure the holistic formation of the total person for

ministry and service – men who are well integrated and psychologically mature, faithful to Church teachings, and who possess a clear understanding of the meaning of, as well as the spiritual and emotional capacity to commit to chaste celibacy for life. The objective, therefore, of all initial and ongoing formation in religious life is the continuous development of the whole person especially in the areas of human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral growth and understandings. The accomplishment of this objective is a complex and complicated endeavor. It involves open, honest and transparent communication between the individual, those entrusted with their formation and those who lead the congregation, namely, major superiors who receive in the name of the congregation members to vows and / or priestly ordination.

CMSM does not establish policies for individual religious communities. Nonetheless, it has supported and been a resource for the long standing policies and procedures already incorporated by religious communities in their initial formation programs. These agree with the *Instruction* as it delineates the need for personal discernment with the aid of one's spiritual director as well as those charged with formational discernment as to an individual's affective maturity and ability to embrace a life long chaste celibate commitment. This *Instruction* also notes that while respecting all persons with homosexual tendencies, the Church cannot admit to the seminary or to Holy Orders those who are engaged in homosexual practices, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called "gay culture." These activities are seen as a contradiction to the choice of a chaste celibate lifestyle and thus diminish the powerful witness of radical discipleship. The final responsibility for approving a religious for priestly ordination suitability is the congregation's major superior after consultation with those entrusted with his formation.

According to the *Instruction* a priesthood candidate's ability to live a chaste celibate commitment must clearly be recognizable for a period of at least three years prior to ordination. For religious men, regardless of sexual orientation, the ability to commit to chaste celibate life is a requirement already incorporated in the general guidelines prior to acceptance into a religious community and then by reason of vows at religious profession.

The Conference of Major Superiors of Men is grateful for the commitment of the members of the various religious congregations whom we serve. These are good, holy and spiritual men through whom God is accomplishing and has already accomplished many good things. Since this *Instruction* speaks directly about persons with homosexual tendencies, it is important to thank those religious who have been examples of celibate chastity and to remind us that we are brothers to one another and so support each other in our ongoing formation for affective maturity. May God's grace continue to be with us all as we move forward in our vowed commitment to the Gospel of Christ in service of the Church.

On Behalf of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men
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