



Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls

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Gifts of the Divine Creator: on being Male and Female

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Memorial of Saint John Vianney

To all Catholic Faithful of the Diocese,

God's love, by its very nature, seeks the good of others through a communion of loving friendship. God created human beings with unique and complementary features as males and females. God's love, reflected in the very order of his creation, is generative. By leading us into a communion of friendship with himself and others, divine love fulfills what we most long for.

In baptism we are blessed with the very gift of God's own spiritual life. Created in God's image and likeness, and with the help of the grace we receive through the sacraments, we can truly live as we were made to live, sharing in the communion of loving friendship with God and others. When we receive God's love, the very nature of that love inspires us to seek the objective good of the other as God has created it to be.

In recent years, the transgender question has pervaded many aspects of American society, from Hollywood and journalism, to corporations and academia, to politics and government, to the internet and social media, to schools and libraries. Some people have come to accept transgender ideology out of a wish to express affirmation or tolerance for others. Insofar as this is motivated by the innate desire to love others, it contains a seed of goodness. But at the same time, there are serious concerns around what transgender ideology claims or teaches. Given the relatively brief period it has been a part of our human experience, there is also a seeming lack of regard for transgenderism's consequences for individuals and the human family. Thus, this letter seeks to examine transgender ideology in rational terms and to bring it into the light of faith, motivated by God's love. God is love, and he will give us all we need.

What is transgender ideology?

Advocates of transgender ideology explain their belief that to be a male or female is a fact that proceeds from one's inner experience rather than one's body.¹ According to this claim, human reproductive anatomy is irrelevant to a person's sexual identity as a male or female. Consequently, for example, the ideology asserts that men can become pregnant and women can become fathers. It also teaches that a person might not be a man or a woman at all but might be a blend of both, or neither. It variously asserts that one's gender might be wrongly "assigned" at birth and also that it may be "fluid" and change throughout one's life.

Transgender ideology argues that people who identify as transgender should express it in appearance, mannerisms, and speech, and that others should affirm these behaviors and address those who identify as

¹ See, e.g., <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/gender-identity/transgender> ("Gender identity, whether transgender or cisgender, is about who you ARE inside as male, female, both, or none of these.")

transgender with new names or pronouns. Many also advocate for using surgery or drugs to “affirm” one’s asserted transgender identity. These can include using powerful drugs to stop normal pubertal development in adolescents, hormones to spur the development of cross-sex secondary sexual characteristics in post-pubescent aged youth or adults, and/or surgeries to one’s face, torso, or reproductive organs to give the appearance of being the opposite sex.

While transgender ideology has become more known in recent years, gender dysphoria has been recognized and diagnosed by psychologists for many decades. This condition is characterized by psychological distress and a sense of incongruence in relation to one’s gender.² Before the cultural prominence of transgender ideology, the incongruence experienced in gender dysphoria was thought of mostly in medical or psychological terms, not ideological or political ones. It also was previously quite rare.

Answering with Compassion: the Nearness of God’s Love

Gender dysphoria is often accompanied by profound suffering.³ To all who may be experiencing gender dysphoria, or who may have a friend or loved one experiencing it, know that you have a home in the Church. Jesus, the Son of God, knows of the suffering of humankind. He knows of your personal struggles, whatever they may be. He is with you, and he loves you with infinite love. Whatever you or others may be experiencing, know this: God is with you and loves you.

Know, too, that other people stand ready and willing to listen to you, to walk with you, and to love you. While it is not my role to delve into the details of therapeutic care, know such care is available. As humans, we are both body and soul. There is a deeply important spiritual aspect of our human nature. It is important to recognize that grace (God’s spiritual gifts) perfects our nature. Those with professional skills in psychology and medicine can be instrumental to helping address emotional or psychological obstacles in our natures so we may come to a fuller experience of God’s tender, infinite love and all the spiritual graces he wants to give us. Skilled counselors are available including at The Lourdes Center. They can be contacted at tlc@sfcatholic.org.

A Short Catechesis on Gender and Sexuality.

Human beings are male or female. In Holy Scripture, we read, “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*”⁴ Male and female complementarity reflects God’s image because it is a communion of persons that bears fruit in new human life. In this way, the marriage of a man and a woman, where “the two become one flesh,” is an icon of the Holy Trinity, itself a fruitful communion of divine persons. Transgender ideology contradicts and undermines this nuptial principle inherent in male-female differences, which are for “communion and generation, always in the ‘image and likeness’ of God.”⁵

² American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM-5)* (5th ed.).

³ See, e.g., Evans, M. (2022). ‘If only I were a boy ...’: Psychotherapeutic Explorations of Transgender in Children and Adolescents, *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 38(2), 269–285 (“Children and young adults suffering from gender dysphoria are often dominated by the fear of being unwanted if they are less than perfect.”).

⁴ Genesis 1:27.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Address to the Bishops of Puerto Rico*, June 8, 2015.

There is a “given-ness” to male-female human sexuality, too, that is not fluid or changeable. Human identity as male or female is a gift to be received, not an individual choice that can be selected or changed.⁶ In his encyclical on God’s creation, *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis writes that “man ... has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will.”⁷ This highlights one of the tasks of parents and teachers, to help children grow in understanding of their bodies as gifts. Gifts created by God. In particular, when it comes to transgender ideology, when introduced at the appropriate age, “sex education should help young people to accept their own bodies and to avoid the pretension to cancel out sexual difference because one no longer knows how to deal with it.”⁸ We are called to acknowledge and accept our sexual identity as male or female.⁹

Regardless of whether we are male or female, married or celibate, understanding our bodies as gifts from God is important to living healthy, happy, and holy lives. This gift is oriented towards fatherhood and motherhood. Transgender ideology undermines the very basis for marriage and family, which are foundational to human society itself. This problem is so very concerning, as all children need and have a right to a mom and a dad.

As Pope Francis has reflected, in a world that sadly has diminishing numbers of marriages that witness to the joy of faithful married love, attempts to deny or manipulate our sexual identity might be understood as expressions of frustration or resignation, as attempts to “cancel out” sexual differences because of an inability to deal with them in a healthy way.¹⁰ Yet such attempts create another problem, not a solution. In this light, the importance of the witness of healthy, happy and holy marriages becomes all the more clear. To those of you with a vocation to marriage, know that living your vocation well is a balm for a wounded world.

A Task for Missionary Disciples: “Make love your aim.”

As is always the case in the Christian life, a gift becomes a mission of love. The truth of God’s love as manifested in creation is not something we need be ashamed of, nor is it a specialized topic reserved only for experts in psychology, education or theology. The truth of God’s love is the inheritance of every baptized person. It is a light that we as Christians have a particular duty to set upon a lampstand for all to see, precisely because the created complementarity of man and woman, properly understood, is not only a pathway to individual and social harmony, but perhaps most poignantly, it is “the image of God”; that is, it is itself a proclamation of the Creator who is love, and who has written love into the very order of our humanity. It is the duty of all the baptized to joyfully announce this!

This proclamation is especially important in the education and accompaniment of young people, a mission God has entrusted to parents, clergy, teachers and catechists. We all should have confidence in teaching of the goodness of sexual complementarity, which in turn points towards the goodness of its generative Divine Creator. Know that God will give you the grace you need to fulfill this most important mission! Additionally, those working in healthcare or in positions of public leadership or professions of public trust, know you have a special responsibility to uphold the truths of God’s gifts in human sexuality.

⁶ Cf. *Amoris Laetitia*, 56.

⁷ *Laudato Si’*, 155, quoting Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to the German Bundestag*, Sept. 22, 2011.

⁸ *Amoris Laetitia*, 285.

⁹ *Catechism*, 2333.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, April 15, 2015.

Your daily work requires special attentiveness to these truths, which are so important to authentic human dignity.¹¹

Finally, with these reflections in mind, I encourage all people to turn to Jesus, who longs for us to tell him of our difficulties. Give them to him in prayer. Jesus is always waiting for us, especially in the Eucharist. Have confidence that he will give the grace needed at each moment of life. Strengthened by God, and recognizing that transgender ideology can assert itself as absolute and unquestionable—a tendency that can tempt us towards fear or indifference—all the baptized must have the courage to love as God loves, in accord with the truth of the human person. In this, as in all things, we entrust ourselves to the Blessed Virgin Mary, our mother.

In the love of God,



The Most Reverend Donald E. DeGrood
Bishop of Sioux Falls

¹¹ See *Christifideles Laici*, 38.