

# 'Respect and sensitivity'

**By Christopher Guntz**

The Synod of Bishops at the Vatican last month opened a hornet's nest on topics such as divorced Catholics and Catholics who are homosexual. A mid-synod document that included language that the church should be more welcoming of those with same-sex attraction who desire marriage was revised for the final document.

As part of the continuing discussion, the Vatican this month will sponsor an interreligious conference that aims to "examine and propose anew the beauty of the relationship between the man and the woman, in order to support and reinvigorate marriage and family life for the flourishing of human society," according to organizers. Pope Francis will address the conference and preside over its first morning session Nov. 17.

The "relatio" - the document that summarizes the work of the synod and sets the stage for discussions in the coming months as the church prepares for the World Meeting of Families in September 2015 in Philadelphia and the follow-up synod in Rome next October - acknowledged that some families include someone with a homosexual tendency.

"In this regard, the synod fathers asked themselves what pastoral attention might be appropriate for them in accordance with Church teaching: 'There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family.'"

The Catholic Review reported in the Oct. 23 issue about a program at St. Matthew Parish in Northwood designed to help parents of those with same-sex attraction and for gays and lesbians themselves to understand better the dynamics of "coming out" to family members. The session is an example of the real-world experiences of Catholic families around the world that the synod fathers were trying to address in their deliberations.

The issues of gay Catholics, or Catholics who are divorced and remarried, or couples who are committed to each other but struggle with issues at home, are not just synod issues. These are local issues that need pastoral solutions, solutions the coming year of discussions aims to find and promote.

The relatio noted that "men and women with a homosexual tendency ought to be received with respect and sensitivity. 'Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.'"

An element of that respect and sensitivity is to acknowledge the presence in our midst of people with same-sex attraction and to address their struggles and

concerns. Some have criticized the Review for reporting that Father Joseph L. Muth Jr., pastor of St. Matthew, implied that church teaching on same-sex marriage might or might not change, acknowledging that he had no control over that. Others objected to the graphic accompanying the article, which featured hands colored in the rainbow, a symbol adopted by the gay rights community, holding a crucifix. Others objected to coverage of the event at all.

To have ignored such a story would not have done justice to the lived experience the synod hopes to address. With that said, the Catholic Review, as the official Catholic newspaper of the archdiocese, should have provided an authoritative voice that made clear the church's teaching. And we should have been mindful that the crucifix is a powerful image and that when that image is combined with another message, it can confuse people. We regret that some people were offended by that.

There is - and likely always will be - tension between church teachings and those who have a homosexual tendency. The relation makes clear that church teaching will not change.

The Catholic Church upholds the traditional definition of marriage as between one man and one woman and teaches that any sexual activity outside of marriage is sinful. The church also teaches that homosexual attraction itself is not sinful and that homosexual people "must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity."

The Catholic Review has reported in the past on groups such as Courage and EnCourage, support groups for those with same-sex attraction and for their parents and family members, respectively.

As we look forward to the coming year of discussions about the strength of families, we will have more opportunities to report on the issues affecting men, women and children throughout the world and in our own archdiocese. The family, which "Gaudium et Spes" called the "school of humanity," still has much to teach us.

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