

March 18th, 2023

Dear Archbishop Sample:

The community of Saint Andrew Parish writes to you to express our concerns and offer an invitation to open an ongoing dialogue in the spirit of community regarding the Archdiocese of Portland's recently-published document, "A Catholic Response to Gender Identity Theory." We acknowledge the complexity of these topics and your sincere desire as the shepherd of our people to be of service to the youth in your diocese; while we share your commitment to love and support the "whole person," we believe that Jesus' imperative to love and affirm all requires us to meet each person where they are, and we have deep concerns about this document's potential effect on a vulnerable community of youth.

We believe that our actions, and the principles which guide them, must at all times be inspired by the expansive and transformative nature of Jesus' love: always affirming, never shaming, inclusive of the marginalized and devoid of judgment toward those cast out by the establishment. We share your commitment to helping schools follow Christ's teachings and allowing children to thrive in a complex, ever-changing world; we fear, however, the unintended consequences of this document upon the mental health of vulnerable children, increasing their already high risk of suicide. When families cannot accept or support their own children, those children have a right to expect their schools and churches to be safe places. We fear these policies will cause lasting harm to the young people they are intended to help.

Transgender youth make up approximately 0.4% of the U.S. youth population. This small, vulnerable group is already targeted by society as "different" and frequently ridiculed, bullied, and abused by their peers, at times even by their own families. Their real-life stories tell us about the incredible suffering and isolation they experience when their identities are not affirmed and embraced. Puberty is already a difficult time for any child to navigate, regardless of gender or background; in a world which is telling these children that their very identity is against God, restricting their ability to express that identity will only encourage them to envision a future without them in it. The transgender and nonbinary experience is not a theory or a trend; it has a rich history dating back thousands of years and spanning every region of the globe, from Sumeria to Siberia. LGBTQ people have always been here. That they are more visible now is a blessing; it means the world is safer for people to express their true selves.

As a community of faith, Jesus' imperative to protect the vulnerable outsider invites us to listen to their lived experience and walk with them in empathy and compassion. Catholic writer Maxwell Kuzma, in responding to Abigail Favale's book *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory*, writes: "The struggle of my own transgender life was not in identifying myself or in knowing who I was, but in realizing that those who told me they loved me would only respect me if I played a role that did not ring true to me . . . I am not a theological problem to be solved but a transgender person to be loved."

Attached you will find our Community Statement on behalf of our transgender and nonbinary community. We are already in dialogue with many other institutions throughout the diocese on this topic. In addition, a number of individual parishioners from St. Andrew have sent postcards to share their own stories, and over 100 have added their names to this letter to express how this

issue affects their lives, their families, and their loved ones. We encourage you to give them all prayerful consideration.

We hope that this letter will inspire you to hold listening sessions to become more acquainted with members of the transgender and nonbinary community, young and old, and deepen your understanding of their real life experience. We would be happy to work with your office to facilitate this process. In the interim, we implore you, from a place of love and shared concern for our youth, to consider rescinding these harmful guidelines and engaging in constructive pastoral dialogue, as our shepherd, with the LGBTQ Catholics in your diocese. As the end of the school year approaches, we feel a strong sense of urgency to communicate with schools and families about this matter.

Yours in Christ,

The Community of Saint Andrew