

What the Catholic Church Wants the Transgender Community to Know

By Christina Mead for **Life Teen**

Any time I write about topics like this I get nervous. I get a pit in my stomach and I worry that whomever reads it won't fully understand, 1) what I'm trying to say, and 2) that it comes from the best part of my heart.

It comes from a place in my heart that only knows care and concern and love. It's the part that wants to welcome everyone with open arms. The part where my deepest desire is that no one would ever be turned away from a pew in a church. I wish that no one would be looked upon scornfully, or judged for their outside appearance with no regard for what matters most — *who they are*.

So it's from that place that **I'm here to tell you first and foremost that the Catholic Church, as a whole, loves you.**

I'm so sorry if that isn't what you've experienced personally. If a person, or group of people who associate themselves with the Church have treated you poorly... well then you and I need to forgive them together. It wasn't accurate. It wasn't how the Church has ever encouraged them to treat you.

Our model is Jesus Christ. He let anyone sit and share a meal with Him. He saved the outcasts from the shame of isolation. He welcomed those whom others had judged and labeled as sinners. And He spoke the truth in love.

We're trying to do all those things.

The Catholic Church is in a position whereby we are upholding what God has revealed. We look to God, our creator, to understand how He intended His creations (us) to live life and how to live well.

And if you're a teenager who experiences that your body doesn't feel like your own, and that you weren't meant to be the sex indicated by your body, I totally understand how it can feel like the Catholic Church isn't the place for you.

But you are welcome here. This is why:

We understand life may feel overwhelming for you. Gender Dysphoria (the condition of feeling one's emotional and psychological identity as male or female to be opposite to one's biological sex) is a very real condition and many people suffer greatly because of it.

However, **God doesn't make mistakes.** When He fashioned you in your mother's womb with the care of that of an artist making His one and only greatest masterpiece, God took delight in choosing the things that make you uniquely you. **If you feel like there was some big mistake when you were created, then let's just be brutally honest and say that we don't share the same definition of God.** If God is an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving Father, it is *impossible* for Him to make mistakes because it would be contrary to His nature. God created you male or female for a reason.

If your sex is a source of suffering in your life, I want you to know that God can be there with you to comfort you and help you through that suffering. He doesn't promise to take away our sufferings and struggles, but He does promise to be there carrying our crosses alongside us.

Regardless of how you experience your mind, body, and sexuality being in contention and working against one another, there are a couple things that are true for all of us.

#1 You are precious and loved and worthy of good things.

You are not defined by your sexuality. You are first and foremost a son or daughter of God and being His child is the number one priority.

Because you are His child you can find all your worth and validation in Him. He died because He wants to spend eternity with you. That's how personally He loves you.

#2 We are all called to holiness.

Anyone, no matter their sex or how they feel about their own gender identity, is called to holiness and to live a life of self-giving love. God's will for your life is that you grow closer to Him. How each of us does that is constantly changing every day, week, month, and year of our lives.

For this season, He may be asking you to grow in holiness (grow closer to Him) by wrestling with trying to trust Him that He doesn't make mistakes and that He created you as male or female for a reason.

Maybe in the next season of your life, He will ask you to grow closer to Him by working with a therapist to help you relieve some of the daily anxiety in your life caused by not feeling at home in your own skin.

In the future, God may want you to grow closer to Him by learning to love others through self-giving love in acts of service. Whether it be serving the poor, loving your neighbor, or hosting regular get-togethers for your friends, God may challenge you to dive into a life of love in community because that's where fullness of life happens.

#3 Medical advances are to heal not hurt.

If you are having a transgender experience right now, that doesn't mean it's permanent. God has given us the gift of science and the wisdom of doctors to help us heal where we need healing. Doing harm to your healthy body and hormones is not the answer. Your healthy body doesn't need healing. There are other options to help you manage. There are other steps you can take to help your mind not be at war with your body.

We humans are integrated beings. That means our souls don't reside in a round glowing ball in the middle of our chest. Our bodies aren't something to detest, something that holds our soul for now but isn't important.

We are one being. So just as much as your soul is you, so is your body you. What we do with our bodies matters. You don't just hurt my nose if you punch my face, you hurt me. If someone uses my body sexually for their own gratification, it's not just my body that is affected, I am affected – my whole personhood has been hurt by being objectified.

When someone is having a transgender experience, it may feel like sex reassignment surgery, or hormone therapy will heal your body to be more in line with your perceived gender identity. In reality it is hurting the dignity of who you are, body and soul.

#4 Your body doesn't have to define your personality.

I know that societal norms for men and women can be frustrating. Given those norms it can be even more difficult to feel like you don't associate with others of your sex. That's okay. The Catholic Church celebrates the core of masculinity and femininity in their uniqueness apart from societal and cultural norms.

If you feel like you as a male, you don't fit the stereotype of men — so be it! Same for women. No one said you have to. Our differences as male and female are beautiful in the way we can compliment each other, but how drastic those differences will be are naturally going to vary from person to person.

In my relationship with my fiancé, he likes cleaning the house way more than I do... and he's better at it. He also loves shopping more than any man I've ever met. Those may not be the most "masculine" things, but that's his personality, his experience of being male... and that's okay.

What the Church does teach is that there's only one way to have a sacramental marriage – one man and one woman. And the Church affirms the reality that biologically men and women each have something different and unique to offer in the ways they reveal God's image and likeness in their complementary ways of giving and receiving.

#5 The greatest good in life is not genital sexual expression.

There's been a misunderstanding recently that sex is the highest form of love and fulfillment and if you can't have sex, you're doomed to being unhappy and unfulfilled. That is simply not true.

The greatest good in life and the highest form of love is self-giving love.

Jesus on the cross is our example. He loved us so much that He left His throne in heaven to suffer and die for us. He set Himself aside in order to love us. When we give up our own wants and desires for the good of another person, that's self-giving love and with it comes our own fulfillment and joy.

#6 The Catholic Church is a place for us to call home.

I have a hard time telling you that every Catholic Church will be super welcoming, especially if you stand out from the norm because the Church is made up of other broken, sinful people. There are people who might judge you. I've been judged at church for wearing shorts, or receiving communion on the tongue or receiving communion on the hand, or any number of things that others decided to judge me for.

I'm telling you that so you're not surprised. We are a Church made up of people who keep coming back to God for healing and guidance. So if you need help on the road to heaven, if you need encouragement to live a Christian life, if you're looking for some truth instead of the same old, "do whatever you want" mentality, this is the place for you.

This is the place where we are all trying to accept who we are. We are all trying to love ourselves. We are all trying to figure out how to be happy, and how to live lives of love. We are all struggling to accept the limitations of our humanity and find out how to grow deeper in a personal relationship with God.

So if you are a teenager who is having an experience of gender dysphoria... please... come to the table. Sit with us at the altar of plenty and experience God's love and mercy and truth. He wants us all to be free to love Him with our whole being — body, mind, and soul. And if you don't feel freedom, but only burdens within your being, let's walk toward freedom together.

Because you are loved.

You are a child of God.