



# Frequently-Asked Questions about Courage & Encourage

## What is Courage?

Courage is a group of Catholics who experience same-sex attractions and who are committed to helping one another to live chaste lives marked by prayer, fellowship and mutual support. Our members are guided by caring priest chaplains who offer reconciliation and direction for the spiritual life.

Together they pursue the Five Goals of Courage, which were developed by the first Courage group in New York City in 1980 and still guide all of our meetings and work:

1. To live chaste lives in accordance with the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality. ( Chastity )
2. To dedicate our entire lives to Christ through service to others, spiritual reading, prayer, meditation, individual spiritual direction, frequent attendance at Mass, and the frequent reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist. (Prayer and Dedication)
3. To foster a spirit of fellowship in which we may share with one another our thoughts and experiences, and so ensure that no one will have to face the problems of homosexuality alone. (Fellowship)
4. To be mindful of the truth that chaste friendships are not only possible but necessary in a chaste Christian life; and to encourage one another in forming and sustaining these friendships. (Support)

5. To live lives that may serve as good examples to others. (Good Example/Role Model)

## What is EnCourage?

EnCourage was founded in 1992 to provide spiritual support for parents, spouses and other loved ones of people who are involved in homosexual relationships. In many cases, EnCourage members feel torn between accepting their loved ones who experience same-sex attractions, and remaining true to the teachings of the Catholic Church on the morality of homosexual actions.

Guided by compassionate chaplains and supporting one another, EnCourage members pursue the Five Goals of EnCourage:

1. To grow spiritually through spiritual reading, prayer, meditation, individual spiritual direction, frequent attendance at Mass, and the frequent reception of the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist;
2. To gain a deeper understanding of the needs, difficulties, and challenges experienced by men and women with SSA;
3. To establish and maintain a healthy and wholesome relationship with their loved ones with SSA;
4. To assist other family members and friends to reach out with compassion

and truth, and not to reject, their loved ones with SSA;

5. To witness to their loved ones by their own lives that fulfillment is to be found in Jesus Christ through His Body, the Church.

## What does it mean to 'accept' persons who experience same-sex attractions?

*"The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition."* (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2358)

To accept a person means that we love and welcome that person with all their strengths and weaknesses. When we come to know another person's weaknesses, we should be sensitive to their vulnerabilities and show compassion. If others mock or misjudge someone for their weakness, we must be the first to come to that person's defense.

Acceptance of another human being does not necessarily mean that

we will agree with all his or her decisions and choices. Sometimes love requires us to make our disagreement known. For example, a practicing Catholic cannot in good conscience attend a same-sex wedding, as this would imply approval of a union that faith tells us is contrary to God's plan for human beings.

We have many opportunities to reach out and show love and concern for others. The more time we spend in prayer and striving to grow in our relationship with Christ, the more the Holy Spirit will fill our hearts with love, understanding, and patience. Our own example of love and acceptance may draw those around us to the joy of salvation we have found in Jesus Christ and in the teachings of His Church.

### **Why are same-sex attractions considered "objectively disordered"? Isn't that a harsh term?**

The goodness of sexual intimacy comes from its being ordered to the permanent, faithful, procreative union of the marital act; that is, sexual union between husband and wife. The term "objectively disordered" is a philosophical term. It is used to describe homosexual attractions because such attractions can never lead to a morally good sexual act.

The attraction of a man for a woman, or a woman for a man, is objectively ordered toward this marital union, although in particular cases it may be disordered by lustful, promiscuous or adulterous desires. Homosexual attractions, however, are never directed toward the sexual union of spouses who are complementary in nature and whose union can lead to the

procreation of new human beings. In all cases they go against the proper order of willing and acting that is inherent in our human nature, created and redeemed by God.

### **I see that Courage meetings sometimes use a 12-Step format. Why?**

Father Harvey and the first members of Courage drew much inspiration from the famous "Twelve Steps" of Alcoholics Anonymous, and found this approach very helpful in their pursuit of the Five Goals of Courage. Many Courage groups (though not all of them) use the Twelve Steps to focus their efforts, as individuals and as a group, to grow in self-understanding and holiness.

There are many connections between the Twelve Steps and a Catholic spiritual approach to growth in virtue. The first three steps, for example, find the answer to human frailty ("*We admitted that we were powerless ...*") in a complete surrender to the loving power and providence of God ("*We came to believe*" and "*we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.*") They echo the sentiment expressed by Saint Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians: "[God] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. ... Therefore I am content with weaknesses, ... for when I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Cor 12:9-10).

The next four steps speak of the importance of recognizing and admitting one's sinfulness. The powerfully intimate nature of sins involving sexuality --- fornication, pornography, masturbation, lust --- often leads a person who is attached to these sins to experience great shame, which leads to an isolation that makes it very difficult to give them up. A tremendous free-

dom comes from taking responsibility for one's own sin --- sacramentally in Confession, as well as in honest conversations with close friends --- and repenting of them. This inner freedom is the starting point for a renewed integrity and an ability to face daily trials and temptations with peace and perseverance.

Our sins do not just affect ourselves, and so Steps 8 and 9 call us to recognize the impact that sinful decisions have had on other people. A willingness to seek the good of others and to repair the damage that our sins have caused is a powerful antidote to the inherent selfishness of lust and sexual sins. Sometimes this charity is manifested in healing conversations and renewed relationships with family members and friends. In other cases it takes more indirect forms like prayers for deceased loved ones or intercession for others who are trapped by the culture of lust and promiscuity rampant in today's secular society.

Step 10 reminds us that the battle for holiness, and for the virtue of chastity, must be faced daily, and Step 11 proposes constant prayer and meditation on the will of God as the foundation of all of our efforts. The Twelve Steps conclude in the same way as the Five Goals: with a call to reach out to others by giving good example and extending an invitation to experience firsthand the freedom and peace that the fellowship of Courage and its spiritual plan can provide.

Historically, the Twelve Steps were written to assist those struggling with a physical and emotional addiction to alcohol. To say that Courage draws inspiration from the Twelve Steps does not mean that we view same-sex attractions as a disease or addiction, though some of our members deal with issues of

sexual brokenness such as compulsive attachments to pornography or promiscuous behavior. The Twelve Step model may be helpful to them in a particular way, and its underlying spiritual principles are certainly in harmony with the Five Goals that all of our members pursue together.

## Why doesn't Courage refer to its membership as "gay" or "lesbian"?

Courage sees persons with same-sex attractions first and foremost as men and women created in the image of God, with a vocation to live a chaste and holy life through an ever-deepening union with Christ.

Some people say that identifying themselves as "gay" or "lesbian" either privately or publicly simply means that they are acknowledging that their emotional, romantic, and sexual attractions are predominantly and persistently towards the same sex. They hold that these words are simple but essential descriptors for a key part of their identity and claim that the adoption of these labels are a way of "owning" their sexuality and facing the reality of "who they are." Further, they hold that such labels do not interfere with or diminish their commitment to chastity.

While this may be true for some, there are others for whom the embracing of LGBTQ terminology is a stumbling block, for reasons such as the following:

- It draws them into a more secular milieu, causing them to be more tempted to pursue a sexually active homosexual relationship.
- It makes them more susceptible to embracing the politics of "gay" activism which is often at odds with the Church's moral teachings, especially in the area of marriage.

➤ It influences them to disregard or gloss over the Church's teachings on the inclination to homosexual activity being objectively disordered, because the world often propounds the idea that "all things 'gay' are good."

The experience of sexuality in all its subtleties and nuances does indeed have a powerful influence on our experience of life and on how we interact with others; however, we would be mistaken to root our identity in those very subjective currents that can overwhelm us and sometimes lead us astray, apart from the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

Courage also considers the example our adult membership and our pastoral outreach sets for young people whose psychosexual development is still in a very formative stage. Premature self-labelling may discourage a young person from being open to the possibility of further psychosexual development. It may also cause a young person to be more vulnerable to confusion and temptation in the three ways described earlier.

This is why Courage considers it pastorally prudent to avoid terms that may be stumbling blocks to others; accordingly, we gently encourage our membership to think beyond the labels "gay" and "lesbian," while we strive together to grow in our essential identity as men and women formed in God's image, created for intimate and eternal union with Christ.

## What is the Courage Reparational Group? Does it have anything to do with "Reparative Therapy?"

*"Christ's death is both the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men, through 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the*

*world' (Jn 1:29), and the sacrifice of the New Covenant, which restores man to communion with God by reconciling him to God through the 'blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Mt 26:28). This sacrifice of Christ is unique; it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices. First, it is a gift from God the Father himself, for the Father handed his Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself. At the same time it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his Father through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 613-14)*

By his self-sacrifice on the Cross, Our Lord paid the price of our redemption, and offered his own sacred Body and Blood as a "peace offering" for our offenses against God. This perfect act of reparation continues in the sacrifice of the Mass, which makes present in every time and place the one sacrifice of Christ crucified.

The Catholic Church teaches that those who believe in Christ can share in his work of reparation, for their own sins and for those of others, by their devout participation in the Holy Mass and in other works of prayer and charity. Pope Pius IX referred to this "duty of honorable satisfaction or reparation" to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a necessary response to Christ's love for us:

*"The creature's love should be given in return for the love of the Creator . . . [and] to the same uncreated Love, if perhaps it has been neglected by forgetfulness or violated by offense, some sort of compensation must be rendered for the injury, and this debt is commonly called by the name of reparation" (Miscellaneous Redemptor, 6).*

Because the Church's teachings on chastity and sexuality are so neglected in the modern world, some members of Courage join together for prayer to make reparation particularly for sins against chastity.

By sharing together, in person or over the phone or Internet, in prayers like the Holy Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, and Holy Hours in the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament, these Courage Reparational Groups make intercession on behalf of the whole world, and receive grace themselves for their daily strivings to be chaste and holy.

The spiritual practice of reparation is not the same as psychological counseling techniques known as "reparative therapy." (Please read the next question.)

### **Does Courage provide or require therapy for members to change their orientation?**

The Gospel of John (2:25) tells us that Jesus knew the human heart very well, and the Church has always welcomed the insights of the medical, psychological and social sciences in acquiring a deeper understanding of the human person, who is a unity of body and soul. There is no purely "spiritual" approach to holiness that does not also take into account the human mind, human relationships (especially the family) and the needs of the human body.

The authentic meeting point of spirituality and psychology with regard to same-sex attractions is in what might be called "chastity-based therapy." This is very far from an attempt to "repair" or "fix" someone. Rather, those with a deep understanding of the way human beings think and relate to others have demonstrated many ways in which habits of coping with feelings or situations can make one more susceptible to temptations or more likely to seek gratification in ways that are not good for him or her.

Some people find that, in addition to spiritual direction and the sacraments, an ability to talk about their experiences and their present situation with someone who understands these ways of coping, thinking and acting --- well-trained, ethical psychologists and therapists --- gives them insights that help them in their striving to be chaste. Courage respects the decisions some of our members make to seek the assistance of qualified professionals for a better understanding of themselves, their ways of seeing the world and their relationships, all of which can aid in the daily battle for holiness and chastity. However, Courage meetings are not group therapy, and no Courage member is required to seek counseling or treatment of any kind.

### **Is Courage an "ex-gay" ministry? Does Courage believe that someone can "pray away the gay?"**

Courage prefers to think of itself as a "pro-chastity" ministry. Many Courage members have never labelled themselves "gay" prior to coming to Courage. This does not mean that they were unaware of their experience of same-sex attractions - it simply means that they had never chosen to label themselves "gay" in the first place, either because of a dislike of the reductionist nature of the term "gay", or because they kept their same-sex attractions private.

The phrase "pray away the gay" conveys the simplistic notion that a sufficient amount of prayer will always and everywhere deliver a person from the desire for sexual intimacy with a person of the same sex. Courage understands the complexity of same-sex attraction. The many possible contributing factors to the development of such

attractions can vary from person to person, and some people may experience same-sex attractions periodically throughout the course of their lives.

The focus of the Courage ministry is the development of a life of interior chastity in union with Christ. Chastity itself is the fruit of a dynamic relationship with Christ based on love, discipleship, holiness, and charity. Courage believes with the Church that all persons are called to, and are capable of living, a life of holiness and chastity. This is true no matter what our attractions or temptations may be, and even if particular vulnerabilities remain with us for our whole lives.

Each human being is free to ask God for deliverance from specific weaknesses, but we may find, like St. Paul, that God allows us to remain weak in certain areas, so that we will rely more on His grace and strength and grow in humility. Courage prays with and for all its members to grow continually in their relationship with Christ and to receive all the grace and blessings the Holy Spirit has to offer. Courage also believes the greatest healing is the union of a soul with Jesus Christ and the continual turning of that soul to Christ for strength, even in the midst of weaknesses and temptations. This we strive to do one day at a time, with the aid of prayer, the sacraments, good fellowship, and spiritual support.

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