



**Vive Spiritu Fidei**  
*Live by the Spirit of Faith*

**La Salle  
Academy  
Publications**

**Number 6**

**AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC  
UNIVERSITY**

**Hospitality  
to difference:  
Catholic  
schools and  
students who  
identify as  
'LGBT'**

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October 2020

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Stained glass window (detail):  
Terrance Plowright, ACU Art Collection.

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# Foreword

One of the very last pieces of correspondence I received as Principal of a school where I was concluding my tenure was from a senior student. Among other things, he declared his homosexual orientation. His letter was one of gratitude, offering thanks in particular to the staff, who had created a culture where he felt safe and nurtured and his dignity was honoured. But life wasn't without its challenges:

“Being gay in an all-male, religious school can be difficult”, he wrote, but his experience in this Catholic school was positive because the spoken and lived messages that permeated the school's policies, practices and relationships were of, “...resounding respect and courtesy for every person, despite their difference,” he went on to say. In his Religious Education classes, the Church's teaching on homosexuality was communicated clearly, but never in a way that that was demeaning or excessively judgmental. I suspect many other students in Catholic schools could have written the same letter.

This was six years ago and in that time the number of students identifying as LGBT has increased and social mores in relation to sexual identity have shifted. While traditional views of sexual identity are not confined to religious groups, religions such as Catholicism are increasingly seen to

be out of touch with the contemporary world, particularly as it relates to sexual identity. All too often, on the basis of the Church's teachings around sexuality and sexual identity in particular, young people, and indeed the not so young, are rejecting our religion in toto.

A recent study out of Canterbury Christ Church University in the UK has confirmed our experience and observations in Australia: Catholic school educators are increasingly challenged, confused and compromised when it comes to ministering in the space between our prevailing secular society and what is seen as a rigid, uncompromising Church. There is no quick fix to this dilemma but if we don't become more active in this space of discomfort, we will alienate too many people who are intuitively inclined to the Gospel message we seek to proclaim.

We need more open, well-informed, trusting dialogue in this space and we need it now. Our colleagues in Catholic education in Scotland have much to teach us in this regard and one of the leaders in the field is the author of this edition of La Salle Publications, Dr Roisín Coll. I commend it to you as a paper that could help us find a way to open up more dialogue in a space where Catholic educators are yearning for support, guidance and resources.



**Professor Br David Hall fms**  
Dean  
La Salle Academy

# Introduction

This paper is about a significant current issue of interest to Catholic educators and indeed education more broadly. It is about how Catholic schools respond to people, particularly children and young adults, who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)<sup>1</sup> and the impact that this has on the teaching of Religious Education in Catholic schools.

I am acutely aware of the spectrum of opinion that exists on the LGBT matter from within the Catholic community. For example, I know that for some, this will be a welcome addition to any discussion that considers Religious Education (RE) in Catholic settings. However, for others, there may be some disturbance at its inclusion, and this may create strong opposition, even to the terminology to which I refer. However, I have been invited to share my thoughts on the topic and thank the La Salle Academy, in advance, regardless of the variable positions on this emotive topic.

Before I address the scope of this paper, let me begin by explaining why and how I became interested in the field of study. In my own context, Scotland, Catholic schools are the only faith schools that exist. These schools are entirely part of the state system: fully funded by the state, inclusive of all Catholic school teachers being employed by the state. However, enshrined in law, the Catholic Church retains control over the RE curriculum that is taught within the Scottish Catholic schools and the *approval* of all those teaching in these schools in terms of their belief and character.

These two factors have safeguarded the strong Catholic religious identity of the schools for over 100 years.

As you can imagine, being a minority faith group within the country, yet occupying such a prominent position in terms of distinctive educational provision, there have been significant tensions regarding the existence of Catholic schools in Scotland. There exists strong opposition from sections of the wider Scottish community claiming they are divisive, indoctrinate children, breed sectarianism and contribute to the toxic undercurrent of religious bigotry that still exists in the country today, similar to that experienced in Northern Ireland. There have been numerous studies on this last phenomenon, which is very particular to this part of the world since, as we know, Catholic schools for the most part exist harmoniously with other schools elsewhere across the globe. Unsurprisingly, not one piece of research has confirmed any of these extravagant claims. Regardless of this, those involved in Catholic education, particularly over the last three or four decades, have had to be able to articulate clearly and confidently the value of this unique school system to the country as a whole; something which has been very efficaciously done, accepted and endorsed by the Scottish authorities.

However, in recent years, the threat to the existence of Catholic schools in Scotland has arisen in the context of the schools' moral stance on matters pertaining to people who identify as LGBT and how this stance is presented and taught in Catholic

schools. As is the case elsewhere in the world, there has been a rise in claims of people identifying as LGBT generally throughout Scotland with a surge in young people self-identifying according to this lexicon. It is a theme, matter or question that has, in many countries, been insufficiently ventilated in relation to the Catholic school. It is often shrouded in inhibition, confusion, evasion or fear. 'Burying our heads in the sand' does not help us move forward and there is a potential political threat to the mission of Catholic schools from failing to engage properly with it, particularly in countries such as Scotland where our Catholic schools are part of the state sector and expected to conform to all national regulations pertaining to equality and diversity.

So, this question of establishing a position on LGBT exercised my attention and, as Director of the St Andrew's Foundation for Catholic Teacher Education, which is responsible for producing Catholic teachers for Catholic schools in Scotland, I have considered it necessary to engage with it in ways that are academically and professionally informed. This reason for my interest in the area may be described as questionable since it has emerged from a *defensive* position and in response to a rapidly changing climate of secular opinion on the matter. I am, however, obliged to be honest about the origins of my interest in the area and my desire to engage in research within it. Stemming from this interest, I intend to conduct, with two colleagues at the University of Glasgow, a large scale

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper, the generally recognised, understood and inclusive 'LGBT' acronym is used, however the author acknowledges that a range of other acronyms exist.



research project in the UK which will look at the pastoral response of faith schools to children who identify as LGBT, of which Catholic schools will be a significant part. The study is still in its embryonic stages. However, as part of our preparations, we have spent time in dialogue with experts in a range of related fields to open out for wider discussion much of what has been ignored and feared by members of faith communities. Although these deliberations remain at an early stage, what I do hope to develop is an increasing awareness of a matter which I know often exists inchoately in the minds of many Catholic school leaders and religious educators, as well as wider society, and in the process, create a much-needed space for better informed and thoughtful reflection on the matter.

Three discourses impinge directly on the LGBT theme and are inextricably linked: the legal/political, the theological and the pastoral. I will consider all three and discuss their impact on the Catholic school sector and the teaching of Religious Education in light of them. The presentation, therefore, will be in three parts. First of all, I will examine briefly the current climate in terms of the LGBT movement and present a picture of the rapidly changing climate of opinion and activism that currently exists in society. I will give an example from my own geographical context. Next, I will move on to the Church context, but rather than exploring in detail what the Church teaches, which I will assume is known, I will look at the apparent dichotomy that exists between the Church's moral position

and its pastoral position and how this dichotomy affects Catholic schools. There are many complexities around this, including use of language and the range of opinion that exists within the Catholic community. Finally, in relation to the teaching of Religious Education in Catholic schools, I wish to identify gaps and to make suggestions as to what is required to support teachers and leaders of our schools to ensure that they can continue to do their job as confident, authentic and authoritative Catholic educators during great social and cultural change.

# Part 1: The social and cultural discourse on LGBT

In the past 30 to 40 years, there have been significant advances toward greater equality for sexual minorities with landmark changes in how both governments and democratic societies treat members of the LGBT community across the world. From an essentially rights-based perspective, and supported by powerful equality legislation, people are campaigning vigorously through formal and informal groups for what they perceive as a necessary redress of longstanding exclusion and discrimination. Some very recent studies (Tadlock & Glick, 2019; Siegel, 2019; Page, 2019) have demonstrated the rapid growth and ongoing momentum of the LGBT movement internationally, revealing its current youth and vitality. Indeed, the increase in scholarly research on LGBT over the past few decades parallels societal changes regarding increased support for LGBT people more generally. Tadlock and Glick (2019) who focus their studies on North America, Australia and Mexico, explain that:

*Changes over the years allow scholars to investigate topics such as how the LGBT movement compares to other social movements, how various sexual and gender minority communities have been incorporated into the larger movement, and how movement groups have utilised various strategies in pursuit of movement goals.*

Equal treatment for members of the LGBT community has improved at a rapid pace around the world since the gay rights movement first rose up in the 1970s to become a global force for change. This has impacted on civil society as a continuous pattern of social and attitudinal transformation. It includes high profile campaigns for gay rights in the armed forces; equal treatment in the workplace; gender neutral facilities; recognition and support for those undergoing gender reassignment and controversial lobbying for pronoun regulation. In recent years, the boundaries of these movements have begun to extend chronologically and spacially into zones where their presence was previously much less visible or accepted.

With important regional exceptions, Siegel, (2019) highlights how laws criminalising same-sex sexual relations have been abolished in multiple countries and same-sex couples are now able to construct their own families and in many advanced industrialised countries are able to adopt legally or enter into formal surrogacy arrangements. Public acceptance of homosexuality, even in some non-Western countries, has also increased dramatically (Siegel, 2019, p.1).

A comparison of the varying degrees to which the LGBT movement has grown across a range of countries in the developed world highlights some of the factors that have influenced and contributed to this development. For example, it has been recognised that the LGBT movement in Australia has seen a slower progression than in Canada or the United States, in part because it is argued that Australian social rights movements have not historically been as active as in other countries. Tadlock and Glick (2019) suggest that Australian social rights movements have come to consciousness more from a *global* than a *domestic* narrative. In Mexico, it is claimed that a stronger attachment to identification with religion has resulted in slower growth and vitality of LGBT movements despite having better

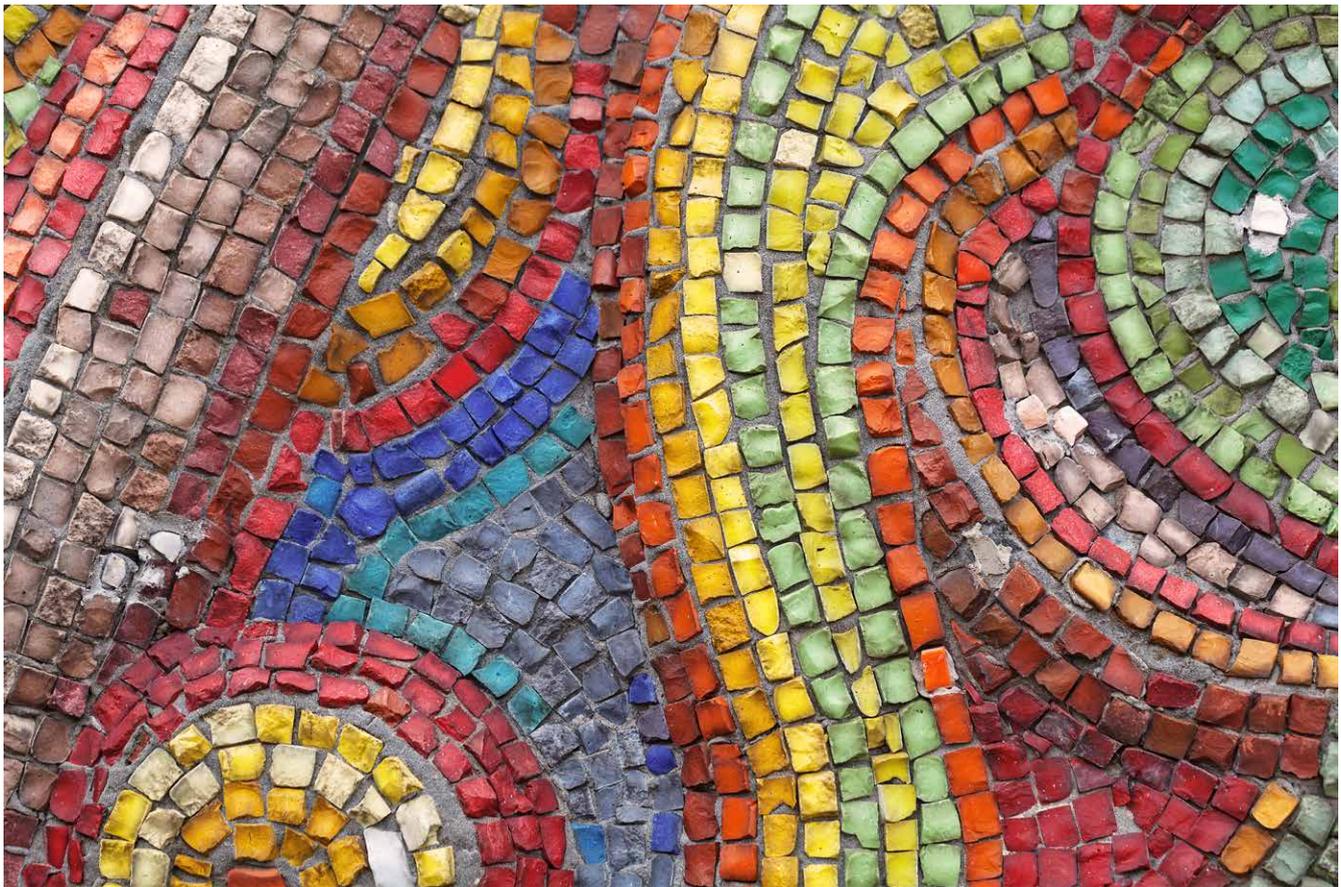
electoral and policy successes, which they attribute to the legacy of historic revolutions and cultural commitments to emancipation.

It has also been argued that the rapid growth and impact of the LGBT rights-based movement on policy and legislation, particularly in Western culture, has arisen as a result of an exceptionally successful strategic vision where networks of activists at the national and international levels have provided the initiative, know-how, and political pressure to motivated politicians to influence both international rules and national rules (Ayoub, 2016). Indeed, this has been the narrative in my own part of the world. It is worth mentioning at this point that in Scotland it is unlawful, under the Equality Act 2010, to discriminate against anyone on the grounds of any of nine named 'characteristics': age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage or civil partnership (in employment only); pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation. Four of these have a specific resonance for those belonging to the LGBT community. Scotland is a country that is proud of its LGBT-inclusive record, which is evident from the Scottish Government's website. The opening paragraphs state:

*Scotland is considered one of the most progressive countries in Europe in terms of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) equality.*

The website [gov.scot/policies/lgbti/](https://www.gov.scot/policies/lgbti/) includes a list of accolades, including recognition by the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA Europe) as the most inclusive country for LGBTI equality and human rights legislation, meeting 92 per cent of its 48 criteria.





This reputation, of course, has an impact on the Scottish school system, an example I wish to draw on to demonstrate how powerful this can be. An LGBT lobby group in Scotland called Time for Inclusive Education (TIE) had its efforts rewarded when 50 per cent of the Members of the Scottish Parliament agreed to offer support for the campaign to have, among other things, mandatory LGBT material taught in all schools in Scotland. They achieved this in a very short period, which resulted in the Scottish Government in 2018 responding by establishing an Inclusive Education Working Party to consider the different proposals offered by TIE. These included mandatory inclusive LGBT content in teacher training programmes and in the national curriculum taught in all schools in Scotland, including Catholic schools. The Catholic Church responded to the initiative by having strong representation on the working party and sub working parties. It was important for those lobbying for the TIE campaign that any agreed outcome would be implemented in all state schools in Scotland, including Catholic schools.

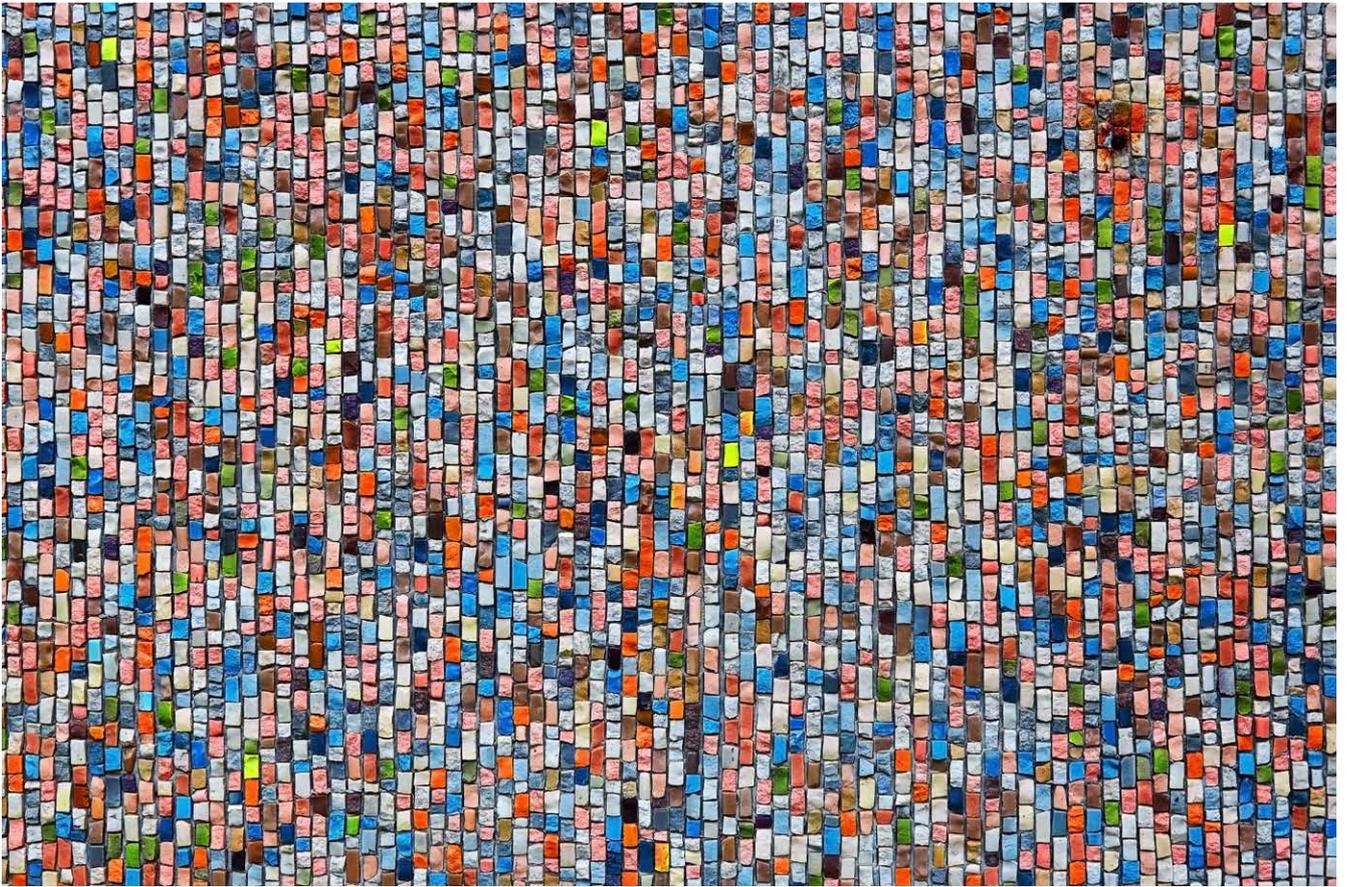
The Church representatives responded by entering into 'genuine dialogue' but throughout the conversations stated that to reach agreement, what was being proposed had to work for the Catholic sector. That is, consideration had to be given to the Catholic Church's position on such matters since Church schools were also a part of the state system. From this basic point of principle, agreement was reached on what could therefore be proposed to the Scottish government. The Church was in a strong position throughout these debates and was treated as an equal voice in the whole process.

The Church's position on the wider LGBT debate, through the work of the Scottish Catholic Education Service, has fundamentally been about proportionality in terms of how much time, effort and resources are spent on consideration of inclusive education and LGBT matters. Across the nine protected characteristics, those of Race and Disability do not receive anywhere near the same attention. It is also an important point that the Equalities Act in the UK does not prescribe the content of the curriculum even if it sets the parameters. The Act's main

concern is with the *how*.

The Church in Scotland has chosen to engage with the LGBT lobby groups around education, such as TIE, despite some significant internal opposition. It could be argued that it needs to do this because it has to respond to the legal position set by the Equalities Act and the narrative that surrounds it. The Church was acutely aware of the momentum the LGBT movement was enjoying and anticipated this development. Its proactivity resulted in its being 'ahead of the curve', prepared to respond to the challenge in a meaningful way, specifically at a policy level, and this was taken seriously through being given an equal voice in the discussions. It had also produced its own inclusive and equality education materials for use by teachers and these were complemented by staff development sessions for Catholic teachers in Catholic schools.

What is my point here? You will notice that I have not discussed nor cast a judgement on the Church's position on the detail of this lobby group's proposals. This is not the point I wish to make at this stage. What is of note, however, is the *manner* in which the



Church was ready, available and willing to enter into dialogue at a political level. From the very start of the conversation, this stance was critical in ensuring the Church had a voice. It was not *reacting* to policy which would affect, among other things, what is taught in schools, rather, it was *influencing* its direction. Of course, the Church had a place at this table and was invited to participate. As mentioned earlier, Catholic schools are part of the state system in Scotland and the Church retains legal jurisdiction over the content of the RE curriculum in its schools. Importantly, had the Church chosen not to engage (which it could have done and has done in many countries about similar political initiatives), then the outcome of this political working party could have been significantly different.

Dialogue is paramount. The latest issue of the *Journal for Catholic Education* is devoted to 'The Challenges and Opportunities of Including the LGBTQ Community in Catholic Education' and the introductory paper by Hutching and Fisher highlights the need for such exposure since they recognise that "LGBTQ people,

whether students, parents, teachers, or administrators, exist in Catholic educational institutions" (Hutching & Fisher, 2019, p.3). Yet there has been a dearth of research on the wider topic to help guide Catholic educators who have had to balance adherence to the doctrine of the Catholic Church and the pastoral needs of those in their school communities. The research claims that when "Communities are not represented in research, when experiences are not identified and documented through a systematic approach to inquiry, a message of exclusion – not inclusion – is sent" (Hutching & Fisher, 2019:3). This doesn't help. From the outset of the journal article, the importance of dialogue is highlighted and explained for this context:

*For controversial topics, dialogue brings into focus the possibilities for genuine openness, listening, and transforming. Through the process of dialogue individuals and institutions can grow and better understand each other. Even when disagreement exists, the process of dialogue builds trust and greater connection.*

# Part 2: The Church discourse

In this next section of the paper I will highlight a particular challenge that has arisen for the Church in the context of the Catholic school when considering the identity and growth of all children. Then I will look at the theological roots of a Christian understanding of 'hospitality', a concept undergoing a prolonged revival of interest today in both sacred and secular ethics, and the importance of 'otherness' which also has a firm locus within this conversation. As we enter into this discussion, I first want to draw our attention to language use. Consider the language used within these two quotes:

It would be hard to argue with either passage. Key words such as 'openness', 'interested', 'trust', 'encounter', 'respect', and 'tolerance' indicate a desire for two positions to find common ground. For example, 'trust' cannot exist in isolation. The very definition implies that two different positions are occupied and 'trust' is an understanding and belief established between the two. 'Openness' is about the accessibility and transparency of different positions alongside a desire to engage. 'Respect' implies affirmation of the other as a result of his/her humanity.

*The Catholic school should be an educating community in which the human person can express themselves and grow in his or her humanity, in a process of relational dialogue, interacting in a constructive way, exercising tolerance, understanding different points of view and creating trust in an atmosphere of authentic harmony. Such a school is truly an "educating community, a place of differences living together in harmony. The school community is a place for encounter and promoting participation..."*

**(Congregation for Catholic Education, 2019, para. 40).**

*Catholic schools should stimulate in pupils the openness to the other as a face, as a person, as a brother and sister to know and respect, with his or her history, merits and defects, riches and limits. The challenge is to cooperate to train young people to be open and interested in the reality that surrounds them, capable of care and tenderness.*

**(Pope Francis, 5 January 2018).**



In this context, and in the two examples cited, I consider that the use of language here is helpful. I should issue the caveat that this is not always the case with Church documentation, a view shared by senior Church leaders. For instance, Cardinal Joe Tobin, Archbishop of Newark, was asked on US national television, 'how can you welcome people that you call 'intrinsically disordered'?' referring to language used in the Catechism in relation to homosexuality. Responding, Tobin says, 'I don't call them intrinsically disordered. That is very unfortunate language. Let's hope that eventually that language is a little less hurtful' (Online, April 2018). He urged Church leaders to minister with more compassion since 'LGBT Catholics are as much a part of our Church as any other Catholic.'

Appropriate language use is critical and highly symbolic of perspectives or positions. Pausing to remind ourselves of the Wittgensteinian argument that a word or even a sentence has meaning only because of the context or field in which it is written is instructive. In this highly emotive LGBT context, every word that is representative of the Church's position is considered, scrutinised, debated, accepted or refuted. Hence, the 'meaning' that is intended has to be very carefully measured or interpretations of it can be, as we know, explosive. This is also of importance to key Church members such as the Religious Education teacher when educating children in schools about such matters. How many of us have heard colleagues and friends echoing the comments of Tobin, that the Catechism has such unhelpful language in relation to what the Church teaches on same-sex attraction? Note that at times the conversation is about the unhelpful *language* rather than the unhelpful *doctrine*. These are two separate things but often the conversation about the doctrine or teaching cannot get started if the language used to discuss it is already a stumbling block.

I have peers who won't engage in any discussions about LGBT matters because they consider the use of the terminology as a secular construct synonymous with condoning everything that the LGBT movement represents. I know others who make a point of using secular terminology by way of demonstrating solidarity between a person of faith and the LGBT community. You can imagine it is a lot of fun when we get together! Language use is highly symbolic



and meaning has to be managed exceptionally well if purposeful dialogue is desired.

There is a burgeoning interest in the concept of 'hospitality' in theological, philosophical and anthropological literature. In his Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XIV writes: "This real life, towards which we try to reach out again and again, is linked to a lived union with a 'people' and, for each individual it can only be attained within this 'we'. It presupposes that we escape from the prison of our 'I', because only in the openness of this universal subject does our gaze open out to the source of joy, to love itself – to God' (para. 14). This embraces the theme of hospitality and the importance of reaching out to the other and supporting community. Benedict goes on to warn against exclusivity as well as society's fear of involvement with the other.

In many of its documents, the Church has recognised the importance

of understanding the concept of 'otherness' or being 'othered'. One of the latest publications which has received significant attention, *Male and Female He Created Them* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2019), which responds to contemporary Gender Theory, states that the formation of one's identity is based on the principle of 'otherness'. It explains that the direct encounter between another 'you' *who is not me* enables me to recognise the essence of the 'I' who is me (para. 27). Difference, it goes on to say is, in fact, a condition of *all cognition*, including cognition of one's identity, "One's identity as a human person comes to authentic maturity to the extent that one opens up to others..." (para. 33).

McGovern (2010) has explored this concept of otherness through a Christian lens and through its relation to an ethic of 'hospitality', focusing on its roots in scripture and paying particular attention to the person of Jesus.



*He who receives you, receives me; and he who receives me, receives him who sent me* (Matt 10:40).

Using such scripture, McGovern demonstrates that the ethic of *hospitality* is powerfully present in much of Jesus' life and ministry. 'Jesus is portrayed in the New Testament as a wanderer without a home. From the very beginning of his life there is 'no room...at the inn' (Luke 2:8) (p.73). Throughout his ministry, she explains how Jesus relies on the hospitality of others, for example Martha and Mary, Zacchaeus, and this continues after his Resurrection, e.g. on the Road to Emmaus. Jesus remains a 'stranger' even to his disciples who do not really know him (John 21:12) and don't really understand him (John 3:4).

McGovern highlights how Hans Frei attempts to capture the elusive figure of "Jesus the stranger", "Jesus is the archetypal man, or the pattern for authentic humanity. He is the stranger – as we all are – in this harsh and hostile universe... In just this wandering estrangement, Jesus is our embodiment or representative... As early as the moment of his conception and birth, it is symbolically the case that he has no place to lay his head." (1997, 29).

She claims that this reflection on the humanity of Jesus is helpful to Christians and others since 'all readers and listeners are invited by the textual strategies of the New Testament to see something of *themselves* in the person of Jesus: their own loneliness, their isolation, and their personal search for a hospitable community' (p.74). We welcome the stranger because we are strangers ourselves – and often to ourselves (ibid).

Matthew's Gospel demonstrates how hospitality and otherness are also key

features of Jesus' *teaching*. There we find the parable of the sheep and goats (25:31). Those deemed righteous are those who were hospitable in feeding, clothing and welcoming the stranger which is portrayed by Matthew as the moral imperative for the followers of Jesus to demonstrate their love of God.

Interestingly, McGovern highlights that within the New Testament Jesus, as well as being the 'outsider,' is also seen as the host, welcoming a range of 'strangers' into the Kingdom of God. (Luke 15:1-3). We know that much of Jesus' ministry was spent eating and drinking with those deemed by the society of his time to be outcasts. McGovern explains that "Jesus turned upside down the social and economic framework of his time until both religious and civil authorities came to perceive him as a threat" (p.77). Jesus challenged what was considered acceptable by his actions of healing on the Sabbath, eating with tax collectors and extending his friendship to prostitutes. She explains that Jesus' actions mirrored eschatologically a Kingdom where there would be no division, no discrimination and as Galatians tells us, no distinction between male or female, rich and poor and so on (Gal. 3:28).

'Hospitality' in Greek is *Philoxenia* and words that come from the 'xen' stem can mean 'foreign' or 'strange' but, interestingly, also 'guest'. McGovern explains, "Love of the xenos or 'stranger' seems clearly to have been a central distinctive tenet of Jesus' message and perhaps one of the hardest for his disciples to understand.... Philoxenia is an expression of hospitality communicated at its purest in the New Testament precisely where it overcomes or transcends a fundamental 'estrangement' or fear of the other. Hospitality in this radical

sense expresses or performs a 'coming together', or a sharing between guest and host, in which mutual difference is confronted and affirmed rather than erased." (McGovern, 2010:76).

The concept of hospitality cannot be explored without recognising the need for boundaries or rules for both host and guest to ensure the avoidance of an abuse of hospitality or to protect from those who seek to exploit it for the wrong reasons. An etiquette of hospitality ensures the behaviour expected of both host and guest is learned and accepted. This understanding of hospitality and otherness relates directly to the pastoral response of the Church to children who identify as LGBT in Catholic schools and what should be taught in their Religious Education classrooms. What should be, and is, apparent in many Catholic schools globally is an unequivocal welcome of every human being, regardless of their differences or views, accepting them and treating them as made in the image and likeness of God. The Bishop of San Diego, McElroy, tells us that "the Gospel demands that LGBT Catholics must be genuinely loved and treasured in the life of the church" (Martin, 2017).

In Scotland, the Director of the Scottish Catholic Education Service told me she opens her staff development sessions with the question, 'Did you see on the news or in the paper that story about the Catholic school in Scotland discriminating against a child identifying as LGBT?' When the answer is 'No' she responds, 'That's right – because there is no story. Catholic schools, certainly in Scotland, are places of inclusion and equality regardless of children's backgrounds, how they see themselves and how they identify.'

# Part 3: Implications for Religious Education



This final part of the presentation discusses implications for Catholic schools and the teaching of Religious Education. The primary implication is: “We must lead as Jesus did, first with welcome, not condemnation” (Martin, 2017, p.169).

James Martin’s publication *Building Bridges* received significant reaction from within the Church ranging from Cardinals endorsing his work and acclaiming him as one of the ‘Church’s foremost evangelisers’ to others unleashing what Martin describes as a ‘virtual torrent of hate’ (*ibid*, p.6). Such extreme positions are because of the tension existing between the Church’s moral stance on this matter and its pastoral position. This phenomenon manifests itself daily in the Catholic school where children are navigating their way through life, growing and forming their unique identity in the context of a place of faith that exists within a powerful secular culture. Most days, they encounter peers who identify as LGBT in their school and who are being taught alongside them in the RE classroom.

The Church’s moral position on many of the key topics pertaining to LGBT

matters is expected to be conveyed in the RE classroom alongside the Catholic Social Teaching principle of the life and dignity of each human being. With this principle as a base, and drawing on my earlier observations, a number of points follow in relation to the teaching of Religious Education:

- 1 Religious Education teachers, and indeed all teachers in the Catholic school, must consider not only the language they choose to use in the classroom but *how* it is used. Pope Francis encourages putting adjectives first and teachers should consider this in their everyday conversations. The point here is that it doesn’t matter how someone identifies, educators are required to think about how they frame lessons and how they are leading discussions. Children are children, people are people. The key focus should be to recognise all as being made in the image and likeness of God, having an equal and valid contribution to make to this world with unique gifts which contribute to building the Church in a special way. Reflecting on the ethic of hospitality, nobody should be made to feel ‘less honourable’ than

another. Recognising and embracing ‘otherness’ can only contribute positively to our own understanding of ourselves and our unique contribution to the common good.

- 2 A fundamental position for teachers of Religious Education should be that any Learning and Teaching that happens in the classroom looks at the identity of individuals holistically, avoiding compartmentalisation. Catholic educators are required to recognise that by accompanying young people as they grow and develop we should be encouraging them to understand that a range of characteristics – race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status – contribute to an individual’s identity and when teaching children we should be encouraging them to consider how *all* of these contribute to who they and others are, rather than just one or two. By rooting our work in Catholic Social Teaching and an understanding of Christian anthropology, we encourage children and young people to consider the uniqueness of the person, the differences we have and the growth

and learning that occur when we welcome and encounter the 'other'. Teachers should support them as they consider this, encouraging them to reflect on why society identifies certain characteristics as being more vulnerable than others and what the Christian response to this is.

3 Pope Francis encourages educators to reflect on the 'task of the ears'. Martin echoes this by suggesting that for any learning to take place we need to listen. 'For the Church to exercise compassion, we need to listen. And when we listen, we will learn, we will be challenged, and we will be inspired' (Martin 2017, p.53). A true Christian ethic of hospitality relies on listening to dialogue. In this LGBT context, Catholic school religious educators should not be fearful of young people listening to the perspectives of LGBT people. But young people in the Catholic school context should also be listening to the Church's perspective. They should know the person of Jesus.

They should be knowledgeable and have a good understanding of Christian anthropology so they have a solid basis upon which to form their own opinions. The challenge is to look again at our curriculum to discern whether we provide for this depth of understanding of what the Church teaches to ensure we are confident our children can arrive at *informed* opinions.

4 The interest in Christian hospitality has returned because of globalisation where 'otherness' challenges us daily. In the past this was because of ethnicity, religion and race but we now face a much more stratified society where people are exerting their identity along multiple axes. There is a need to apply the language of Christian hospitality in our Catholic schools, but this requires everyone to *understand* it. A Christian understanding of hospitality should, therefore, feature prominently in our Religious Education curricula and Religious

Education should be the driving force for informing the work of our school pastoral teams, through research and philosophical reflection in the field.

At the start of this paper I referred to our planned research in this field of study. When we had some early meetings to discuss this, one peer challenged the notion of hospitality in the LGBT context and suggested it be replaced with the New Testament's ethic of 'love' and unconditional acceptance. While this is attractive, it is recognised that there are features of LGBT lifestyle that unsettle Catholic belief and so there is a tension or estrangement that we must face. We must find an ethic that is viable where we do not pretend there is no issue or difference. This paper then has argued that an ethic of Christian *Hospitality* in the area of LGBT issues is more granular and nuanced and recognises that there are points of difference and separation as well as solidarity.





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