



ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM
A PANEL DISCUSSION ON SEMINARY FORMATION
OF HOMOSEXUAL CANDIDATES

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SR. MARY ANN FORD TALK ON CHURCH DOCUMENT ON HOMOSEXUALITY

SS. SIMON & JUDE, WESTLAND

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INTRODUCTION

Bishop Tom Gumbleton

Our next speaker, I'm not sure what the theology of guarding angels is today but if there ever was, I do believe in guardian angels. And if there ever was a guardian angel for a local dignity chapter, it is in Sr. Mary Ann Ford. She has been an IHM nun for 53 years now, a teacher at Bishop Foley High School in mathematics and religion. I used to teach the same 2 subjects. I don't quite understand why they joined those 2. But she has really has been the unofficial but lovingly adopted chaplain of the Detroit Dignity for the last 31 years. She's been their councilor, their source of hospitality, their inspiration leader for all those years. And she knows the hearts of that community. And so from that perspective she's going to address the document and share her reflections with us.

ADDRESS DOCUMENT AND HOW IT HAS AFFECTED REAL PEOPLE

SR. MARY ANN FORD

As I was sitting here something occurred to me. I'm going to ask you to raise your hand if you've had a copy of the document in your hand and have actually read it. Just out of curiosity. Okay, about a fourth of the group. I think that's important because I am going to do two things. I am going to address the document as it stands and I'm going to address how it has affected real people - so, kind of both of those perspectives.

Dignity celebrated its 32nd anniversary this past Saturday night and Sunday night. A member of that community, who has always impressed me as being extremely calm, gentle, has a job as facilitator and leader of a large group of educators and has been able to steer his way comfortably to help people to move forward... this is the opening sentence of the comments he wrote. "With all the negative, painful attacks on gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered people coming from the Vatican for the past few years, but especially because of the most recent vitriolic diatribes against us and our priests I feel it is a critical time..." and on he goes. That's strong language. Its language I wouldn't use. Farther down he says "Many individuals are so hurt and angry by the Vatican's words and actions that they have stopped attending liturgy". That's true. And the level of hurt, because amazingly enough, a lot of these folks have read the document, the level of hurt is profound. I give just one example of a young man.

And I would also follow up on what Father Daley said, "Ignorance is the beginning of the whole situation". Ignorance followed by fear, followed by ...(problem with microphone) The young man who came to me was not educated in the Catholic schools and he came to me after having a few catechism classes and that was his total exposure and the family were devout Catholics, they went to church but it was something he did because the family did. It was not something he really fully understood. When he came to Dignity I was conducting an RCIA group and he came and asked to be confirmed. He came for most of the sessions. He missed a very

important one, the one on primacy of conscience which was a bad one for him to have missed. Because when the document came out in the early 90's from the then head of the Congregation of the Faith which said that people who are gay are objectively disordered. That was the last time he ever came into a Catholic church. He was a young man who, because his parents at first couldn't understand that he was gay, I had said to him I will be your mother then if you want me to. And we had a very close relationship and so it was very, very hard on me when this young man decided that that was just not somewhere he could be any more.

And I think that there are many stories like that. I tell that story because I think it typifies what is happening. And people are not aware of that. And if people are in ignorance of what it feels like. And Father Daley's story certainly has given you a very profound understanding of what it is like for almost any gay person to come out to themselves, much less to come out to family, to friends, to workers or in public. These are not easy things for people to do and it's very difficult when you get a document that is written in language that just doesn't understand, or at least portrays itself as not understanding...when it speaks in the very title of having homosexual tendencies.

If I have a tendency to lose my temper I can grow and come to the point where I can control that by a force of my own will. And I can become much more easy to live with. That's within my power and I can control the tendency. I don't control an orientation as Fr. Daley so clearly explained. There's no ... this is who I am and this is how I have been formed by the God who loves me. And this is something that psychologists, biologists of this day understand.

As the document goes forward it talks about this and I will use the exact words of the document here. Forgive me for being the teacher that I am. This document is important. It is made more urgent by the current situation. They're going to be able to back track any day they want because the current situation is the abuse situation and the failure of the bishops to respond appropriately. But that's not actually stated here. But who gets the blame. We had to put out this document to make sure that there's no more bad priests. That's the answer to the problem. And it's clear to everyone today, 50 years from now it may not be so clear. They've been very careful and I don't like that kind of carefulness. In the first paragraph it speaks of arriving at effective maturity. There's a presumption there that homosexuality is a stage that heterosexuals may go through in their teenage years. My experience has been there may be a certain amount of experimentation on the part of some in their development years. But those are mostly heterosexuals who are experimenting. If their gay, there simply living out who they are. And it's not a matter of emotional maturity. But again that's a cover, because the people who are doing the actual abuse are people who are emotional immature whether they are gay or straight. They are people who cannot relate well with their peers. And that should have been found out when they were in seminary. Not whether they are gay or straight. That's not the relevant issue.

The next paragraph goes on to speak of the natural law. When I was young I took a course in philosophy from a very famous woman, her name was Sr. Mary Emil Kanay (???), and she was later on president of Marygrove College. She had her PHD in philosophy. She taught us theology and she introduced us to the documents of the social encyclicals of the church. And she introduced us to St. Thomas Aquinas, and the ???? philosophers. I learned to appreciate the ?????????? I distinguish. And I realized that he based his thinking and definitions of natural law, and it's a very important concept theologically in our church, on Aristotle but also on the understandings of empirical science of his day. Empirical sciences, again as Fr. Daley has so well explained to us, have taught us that we know much more about our human biology and our human psychology; in let's say the past five decades than we have known at all in the past.

This document totally ignores all of that information. There is no willingness to get in agreement – get your theology based on and in accord with the science of the day. That leaves a huge hole because God is truth as well as love. And truth does not contradict itself. God does not contradict God's own self. So theology and science have to be hand in hand if they're going to be true. So when you're going to use natural law, it sounds to me as though what's happening is the 90% would like to discriminate against the 10%. It's simply called the rule of the majority. And that's what happening in our church. And it's our church.

I got started so fast I left out my introduction (Laughter) and I want to go back to my introduction. I'm speaking because I was asked. But I'm speaking because I am concerned for our church, this great community of believers whom I love, and that's why I make my comments. And I think that this is very important that we understand that when they speak of deep seated homosexual tendencies, that's deeper than they want to believe. It's right there in the very nature of the person.

In fact, just within the last week, I read an article that the people from the Swedish Institutes of Science had just published a paper in which they speak of having done 2 different studies. One with gay men and one with lesbian women on the reaction of their brains to sex hormones and they differ from heterosexuals. Surprised? No, we need not be; but again that it's information that nobody, who is writing documents like this is paying any attention to. Now either of two things - either these people are not reading modern science and psychology or they just don't want to read it. And that's a kind way of interpreting it. (quiet Laughter)

The next thing, again, kind of was taken away from me by Fr. Daley, when it says here such persons ????? in fact find themselves in a situation that greatly hinders them from relating correctly to men and women. That your experience? I know it hasn't been mine. And I have been in this position long enough and now enough years, 74 to be exact, that I've dealt with probably easily over a hundred priests in my life and I don't know which ones are gay or straight. There are a couple of gay ones who are very good friends and have told me so but I've been dealt with with respect by every one of them. I didn't have any problem relating. There's something very deeply wrong when you make an assertion like that without any basis for it. It sounds like you're just saying something because it's going to bolster your argument whether it has any basis in reality or not.

I'm sorry, I've been doing so much and I've actually mislaid my proper notes to know where I'm at here. The thing I guess I would most like to say is having heard Fr. Daley, go read the document and find out for yourself. And then maybe some of us need to start writing Rome. There certainly are enough people on the other side of the fence that are letting the hierarchy begin to understand. But when you call somebody objectively disordered, that is taken in America to mean psychologically. I know what Rome thinks it means in terms of natural law. But again, it's not based on reality of natural law. So I would simply ask people to do some of your own thinking and maybe do as a couple of friends of mine who are in the room with regards to the peace issues, keep writing letters. Thank you. (Applause)

SUMMARY

BISHOP TOM GUMBLETON???

Thank you Mary Ann for sharing your profound analysis of the document. But more importantly I think the devastating affects these documents have on those of the gay community especially. We thank you for that presentation but especially for the work you've done these 30 some years with the Detroit Dignity community. Actually the Detroit Dignity is one of the few dignity groups

that has kept its place in the diocese without being closed or moved. And I think that is largely due to the efforts of Sr. Mary Ann. (Applause)