

Active discipleship talk

My name is Katherine Inskeep, I use she/her pronouns, and I've been attending Bellarmine for three years now, ever since I moved to Cincinnati. I coordinate our Building a Bridge group, which is celebrating our one-year anniversary this month. We are working to encourage a welcoming, inclusive, and loving environment at Bellarmine Chapel for people who are LGBTQ+, as well as empower people who want to support LGBTQ+ individuals. I've been asked to speak with you today because, as you may know, June is Pride month.

I helped form the Building a Bridge group because I knew I couldn't be the only gay Catholic at Bellarmine. And I knew that there had to be ally Catholics who wanted to be able to do something to support us. I am blessed and honored that, when I asked whether there was interest in a queer book club, parish leadership already knew people who would want to join. I am even more blessed by the queer and ally Catholic friendships I now have through the Building a Bridge group.

From my experience, I think it's extremely difficult to care about a marginalized group if we don't really understand what it's like to be a member of that community. So I want to give you a very brief window into my life before I talk about why we at Bellarmine are called to serve the LGBTQ community.

I've been Catholic for almost all 25 years of my life. I've also been bisexual that entire time. I have been bisexual my whole life, meaning it is not a choice and it's not something I 'grew into' even though it took me so long to come to terms with it. It's an integral part of my identity as much as being Catholic is. I never questioned being Catholic. A lot of people do. Most of my friends who identify as queer questioned their religion and spirituality very seriously. Some of them chose to leave their church because of the religious trauma they experienced. However, after understanding my sexuality, I made the decision to stay Catholic. Part of that decision was sheer stubbornness: I'm Catholic and you can't make me leave. The other part was my love for God, the mass, our Holy Mother, and everything else that makes the practices of Catholicism irreplaceable to me.

So that's me. And the thing is, I'm sure that almost everyone in this room knows at least one LGBTQ person. Your child, your friend, your coworker, your next-door neighbor. How has knowing them affected your life? What can you do to support and nourish them? The Catechism of our church states that we must treat LGBTQ people with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.

Our first reading today from the Book of Wisdom says, "For God formed humans to be imperishable; the image of God's own nature God made them." This reminds me of one of my favorite scriptural messages, from Genesis: that God created humankind in God's own image. We are *all* made in the image of God, equally so. Our second reading today speaks to this directly. Christ took on poverty for us. "Not that others should have relief while you are burdened, but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their needs, so that their abundance may also supply your needs, that there may be equality." Equality. Justice. Care. In other words, providing others with the things that they need does not mean you yourself receive those things any less. Giving the LGBTQ+ community respect, compassion, and sensitivity- rights we all deserve as humans- does not take those things away from you.

What does it mean to treat LGBTQ people with respect, compassion, and sensitivity? The first step is to recognize our humanity, our made-in-the-image-of-God-ness, if you will. We are loved children of God, and our sexuality is one part of that. The second is to respect the life journeys of each LGBTQ person, to listen to what we've experienced- in our lives, in the Church, in our communities- without judgement. This includes listening to LGBTQ people who have chosen to leave the Catholic church as well as LGBTQ Catholics. The third is to acknowledge the unique gifts that LGBTQ people bring to the church, and

includes welcoming in LGBTQ people who have come to Bellarmine to find their spiritual home. The fourth, and arguably the most important for active discipleship, is to identify the ways in which we have been marginalized, and actively work to fix the systems that marginalize us. For example, our Building a Bridge group pinpointed that the social challenge we most wanted to address as a group was the high suicide and homelessness rate among LGBTQ+ youth. The Trevor project estimates that one-third of LGBTQ young people attempt suicide, and LGBTQ youth make up something like 40% of all homeless youth, despite representing about 10% of the youth population.

That's why we decided to work with Lighthouse Youth and Family Services, which among their many projects related to youth homelessness has a specific ministry devoted to LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. They match youth with volunteers in their host home program, provide an LGBTQ advocate to help with crisis intervention and survivors of domestic violence, and host workshops for families with LGBTQ children to prevent the rejection that leads to experiencing homelessness. Bellarmine is supporting Lighthouse Youth and Family Services for our June Outreach Collection. I invite you to donate to this cause.

At Bellarmine, we're all about active discipleship. So, before I close, I want to leave you with a challenge for an action that *you* can take (besides donating). Just because Pride month is ending doesn't mean that we should stop talking about LGBTQ issues and reaching out to the LGBTQ+ community. This challenge is twofold: one, if you currently don't know an out LGBTQ+ person, I invite you to reach out and grow a relationship with them. Two, once you know an LGBTQ+ person, I want you to tell them that you, a Catholic person, loves them as they are. Because what is the ultimate output of respect, compassion, and sensitivity, if not love?