

Homosexuality & Pastoral Ministry
Fr. Peter Daly
Parish Diary
April 25, 2012

Fr. Peter Daly asks what pastors should say to youth who are suicidal because they are gay.

The young man began to cry.

I asked him why he was so unhappy. He said it was because his family would not accept him. So I asked why they would not accept him. He answered, "Because I am gay. They are very Catholic."

I started to cry too.

Three times in 25 years of priestly ministry I have sat across the room from young men who have attempted suicide because they were gay or feared that they were gay. Several other times, especially when I was in campus ministry at Catholic University, I have talked with young people despondent over themselves because of their gay sexual identity.

Several times I have talked with people who had cut themselves or disfigured themselves because they had such a deep self loathing because they were gay.

According to a study done by the Center for Disease Control, gay and lesbian youth are much more likely than their peers to have thought about suicide or to have attempted suicide. (CDC Study of Youth Risk Behavior Studies 2001 to 2009.) Some scholars, based on HHS data, estimate that about 1500 youth suicides each year (in the U.S.) are committed by homosexual youth.

Why do they commit suicide?

Some are bullied at school. Some feel rejected by their peers, their parents and their families.

And sometimes they feel rejected by their religion and their pastors. Some feel that they are unacceptable to the God who made them. That is a great wrong and a great tragedy.

What can people in pastoral ministry say to them?

First, I think we should say we love them. And so does God.

Second, we can offer them prayer.

Twenty years ago I was asked to represent Catholic University at the reading of names of people who had died from AIDS at the presentation of the Names Quilt in Washington, DC. Each of us was given 20 or so names to read. We were told by the organizers that we were not to add anything or give any speeches.

When I got to the microphone I read my list of names just as I was told.

But at the end of the list something moved me to want to pray for them. It did not seem adequate to merely say their name. So I quickly said our traditional prayer for the dead. "Eternal rest grant unto them oh Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls, and all the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace."

As I came down from the podium on the National Mall, an elderly couple approached me. They were crying. They said that I had read their son's name. They told me that their own pastor had refused their son a burial when he had died of AIDS because he was publicly gay. They said that I was the first priest who ever prayed for their son in public and they were grateful. I embraced them.

What a wrong that pastor had done them and to their son. How could any pastor of souls refuse consolation to the dying and prayer for the dead? They are part of the spiritual works of mercy. That is our reason for being.

If we are not in the business of showing love to God's children, we don't have a reason to be in business.

I thought of that elderly couple as I sat across the room from the young man who had tears flowing down in his face.

No one should feel excluded from God's love. No one should ever be driven to despair. Ever.