

Ministering to Persons with Same-Sex Attraction: What Courage Members Would Like Clergy to Know

Clergy are often called upon to minister to persons with same-sex attraction (SSA). This can be a grace-filled opportunity, yet those called upon to counsel persons with SSA or to hear their confessions may not be sure how best to respond. Courage members offer these suggestions.

What Should Clergy Know?

- The active gay lifestyle leads to loneliness and desolation, a particularly isolating form of suffering. While experiencing same-sex attraction is not a sin in itself, those persons who suffer this attraction often feel guilty and estranged from God, as though they were in sin.
- Persons with SSA deal with an *attraction* rather than with an in-born homosexual *identity*; they need your help in leading chaste lives. Do not assume that a person with SSA is living the gay lifestyle or living chastely. Many are struggling.
- Many with SSA find the term “disordered” hurtful or misunderstand its use—the attraction is disordered, not the person. Urge members to be frank about feeling offended by certain terms. Consider using “wounded” or “broken” in place of “disordered.”
- Persons with SSA can find it very difficult to form same-sex friendships or to find support in loving and compassionate non-sexual relationships. Such friendships should be encouraged, especially through Courage meetings.
- Clergy should be familiar with The Five Goals of Courage and with the value of the Sacrament of Reconciliation for those with SSA. Be familiar with the Courage web site (www.couragerc.org), with Courage on Line (Courage ListServ), and Courage on Call for those isolated members who do not have access to meetings in their diocese.
- It’s very important for clergy to know both Church and local community resources for counseling, AIDS education and testing, STD testing, and any other programs that might assist those persons with SSA. When a person with SSA seeks help, the Church may be the only place he or she can go for this information.
- Clergy should *know* the Church’s teaching on same-sex attraction and same-sex activity and speak clearly about it. Never approve a course of action that is sinful, for example, counseling someone with SSA to “get a steady partner” or that certain sexual activities are “not a sin” when objectively they are.
- Be aware that some persons with SSA will require counseling from a good Catholic (or Christian) therapist. However not all therapists share the Courage goal of chastity for those persons with SSA. It’s helpful to have a list of trusted therapists.
- Encourage true and authentic inner healing prayer: “If God allowed the wounding, God allows the healing.” There is no such person as a “homosexual,” even if there are patterns that repeat themselves.

What Should Clergy Do?

- Do educate yourself about the SSA disorder and *never* deny that it is a disorder. The truth about homosexual relationships is in our hearts; please do not compromise and offer us watered-down Truth. We already know how to create and exploit loopholes.

- Offer a safe place where persons with SSA can discuss their struggles and work on their relationships with God. If there is no Courage meeting in your diocese, consider starting one. Offer to meet with us for spiritual direction; consider inviting us, at the end of a confession, to meet with you for a conversation outside the confessional.
- State clearly the Church's true teaching about SSA but avoid condemnation. It takes courage to admit to SSA or to confess thoughts or actions related to SSA. Please do not try to shame us into holiness; we are already ashamed, more than you can imagine.
- Please suggest a role for us in the parish and/or diocese. We want *to serve* and we have much to offer!
- Please don't be afraid to advise reasonable limits on computer use for those persons with SSA who are addicted to or have a problem with pornography. You might suggest having an "accountability partner"; having a computer in a common area rather than in the bedroom; using the computer when others are present; and utilizing website filters.
- Do challenge the penitent to seek holiness and wholeness while at the same time acknowledging the burden of his or her cross. When we come to you, offer us hope.
- Do encourage the person with SSA to study and live The Five Goals of Courage; encourage prayer, the frequent reception of the Sacraments, and spiritual reading. You might offer a list of good books (see the Courage website) or create a lending library.
- Do your best to give advice that is both *compassionate* and *practical*. Please don't "play the psychologist" unless you have expertise in this area!
- Refer persons with SSA to the Courage apostolate; be knowledgeable about 12-step groups such as Sexaholics Anonymous (SA) and advise these as an adjunct to Courage membership and the Sacraments on the path to healing.
- If you struggle with SSA, please do not share your difficulties or seek social contact with a penitent with SSA outside the confessional.
- Do emphasize the fact that a person with SSA is loved by God, and that His Graces are as available to the person with SSA as they are to anyone else.
- Members of Courage support the priests and the Magisterium. Do know what treasures of healing you hold in your anointed hands!
- Pray for those of us with SSA, and tell us that we are in your prayers! Do know that you will be in our prayers. We are seeking strong, compassionate spiritual fathers. Please be one of them.