



April 16, 2019

STATEMENT: Response to The Times, and the status of Courage in Ireland

Ann Schneible

On April 8 and 9, the Irish edition The Times published three articles which make various claims about the work of Courage International, and its current status in Ireland, which require clarification and correction.

Even though we currently do not have active chapters in Ireland, these articles state that we nonetheless have a presence in Ireland in the form of priests who continue to “teach” the Courage “programme”. They also allege a connection between Courage and “conversion therapy”. Moreover, there is the implication that the services which Courage provide involves a “programme” that is “taught”.

These claims suggest that there may be some confusion about what we actually do.

Courage presence in Ireland: As of late 2017, there have been no official chapters active in Ireland. That December, we were informed that all chapters had closed, at which point we removed the contact information from the main website.

Association with “conversion therapy”: Courage does not provide, refer for, or require any form of so-called “conversion” or “reparative therapy” for its members. A fuller explanation can be found in our [response](#) to a May 2, 2018 hearing in the Seanad which suggested that Courage endorses or provides “conversion therapy”. Additional information can be found on our [FAQ page](#).

The Courage “programme”: The work of this apostolate centers around [Five Goals](#) which were established by our earliest members: chastity, prayer and dedication, fellowship, support, and being a good role model. Where there is a chapter present, members have the opportunity to attend meetings; these meetings involve group sharing, prayer, and are (in most cases) overseen by a Courage chaplain. We also offer regional retreats for members, which are structured like any typical spiritual retreat, with the addition of the opportunity to attend a Courage meeting. Additionally, we host a yearly Annual Conference, which includes talks on a wide range of topics from guest speakers, as well as the chance to attend a Courage meeting. Any formation that may be offered at our meetings or events must always be done according to established Church teaching and pastoral practice; we do not offer any “teaching” program outside of these parameters.

The following are a couple specific points in the articles that require clarification or correction:

A suggested discrepancy between the promotional video which is located on the Courage website, and the statement that there are no chapters in Ireland

- This promotional video was filmed in 2016 and went live in early 2017; at that time, there were still active chapters in Ireland.



Courage has been in contact with former chaplains

- No staff member from the Courage headquarters has been in contact with any former chaplain in Ireland since the closing of chapters.

INTERVIEW

With the aim of providing context to our contribution to the article, we have included the email exchange below (the journalist's questions have been summarized for the sake of brevity). These questions were answered by our executive director, Father Philip Bochanski, and our communications director, Ann Schneible.

Ellen Coyne: *Ms. Coyne first contacted us with a series of questions which touched on various topics, including the status of Courage in Ireland, our stance with regard to the "cause" of same-sex attraction, the use of terms like "LGBT", the writings of our founder, Father John Harvey, The 12 Step Program, and concerns raised by former Irish president, Mary McAleese, regarding young people.*

Father Bochanski:

- I am not aware of any active chapters of Courage International in Ireland. No one has identified himself to the Courage Office as having been appointed to lead a Courage group by his bishop, as is required by our statutes.
- As a public association of the faithful and an apostolate of the Catholic Church, the official stance of Courage International is expressed in the following Church documents:
 - The Statutes of Courage International, which have been approved by ecclesiastical authority and establish the Five Goals of Courage and the Five Goals of EnCourage as the program of the apostolate.
 - The Catechism of the Catholic Church, especially its teachings on sexual morality
 - The Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons, from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (1986)
 - The document Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care, by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2006)
- Neither Courage International, nor the Catholic Church, proposes any particular theory of the psychological or sociological underpinnings of sexual attraction to the same sex. The most that the Catholic Church says in regard to this aspect of homosexual attractions is that "its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 2357).
- Courage International provides a number of resources on our website from various sources, including the works of our founder, Father John F. Harvey, OSFS. The viewpoints expressed in them are those of the specific author(s) alone.



- The quotes you mention are all drawn from the booklet *Same Sex Attraction: Catholic Teaching and Pastoral Practice*, which Father Harvey wrote for the Knights of Columbus in 2007. The text is maintained on the Knights of Columbus website and they are responsible for its editing and publication.
 - Father Harvey had advanced degrees in moral theology and psychology, as well as extensive pastoral experience working with men and women who experienced same sex attractions. His comments should be read as his own informed opinion, but do not necessarily reflect the views of Courage International today.
 - Without trying to justify or refute particular remarks by Father Harvey (whom I did not know personally, and who died in 2010), I would point out that professional guidance contemporaneous with his booklet allows for investigation of the various elements of how sexual orientation develops in a person. In 2008, the American Psychological Association wrote that "There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible *genetic, hormonal, developmental, social and cultural influences* on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. *Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles*; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation" (emphasis added). This guidance still appears on the APA website.
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- In regard to whether a person is "born LGBT", I would refer you to the explanation I give in this video as an accurate expression of the position of Courage International.
 - President McAleese's concerns regarding youth are unfounded, as Courage International has never had groups or programs for people under 18 years of age.
 - Recognizing that, according to the teaching of the Catholic Church, the experience of attractions to the same sex is not itself a sin, Courage does not and has never required that its members try to eradicate these attractions.
 - Courage groups are led by priests chaplains who provide pastoral support, lead prayer and celebrate the sacraments, and not by psychologists or professional counselors. Courage International does not require, provide or refer for therapy of any kind for our members.
 - Many early Courage members found that the spiritual ideals underlying the "Twelve Steps of A.A." provided help in their efforts to live chaste lives, and our founder, Father John Harvey, certainly appreciated their usefulness. Father Harvey's own view was that the Twelve Steps, supplemented with solid Catholic teaching, could be helpful to all who were interested in developing a life of virtue, and not just those who might be struggling with addictions. However, the official "program" of Courage has been and remains the Five Goals. No Courage chapter is presently required to employ the 12 Steps, and many chapters do not.
 - Courage International typically does not use the label "LGBT". Instead, we refer to "people who experience same sex attractions," for several reasons.



- It puts the person first, and keeps us focused on the whole person, created in the image and likeness of God. As Pope Francis has noted, in his book *The Name of God is Mercy* (2016), "before all else comes the individual person, in his wholeness and dignity. And people should not be defined only by their sexual tendencies."
- Using this language allows each person to tell his or her own story, to describe for himself or herself how the experience of attraction affects his or her life.
- This language does not presume that every person who experiences these attractions chooses to define himself or herself by them, nor that he or she espouses the same social or political viewpoint of everyone else who identifies as "LGBT".
- I do not know what particular resources you have in mind when you mention "videos which advise what language can and should be used by those advocating the programme so that they can avoid appearing bigoted and homophobic." But I think that you are mischaracterizing our approach. Courage International, as the Catholic Church itself, calls on its members *not to be* bigoted or homophobic. On the contrary, we insist that people who identify as LGBT "must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity" as the Catechism says (no. 2358) and that "violent malice in speech or in action" against them "deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs," as the CDF wrote (no. 10).

Coyne: *The Journalist proceeded to ask a follow up question to clarify our status in Ireland, whether us saying that we had no "active chapters" in Ireland meant that we had no "presence" in the country.*

Father Bochanski:

It is my understanding that the Dublin group is currently inactive, not meeting or receiving members. I am not in contact with any priests in Limerick or Cork so if they are claiming to be part of the apostolate it is without connection or contact with us.

Obviously I can't comment on what a priest whom I don't know does or doesn't say or do, nor whether it does or doesn't reflect our approach. But to my knowledge, no priests in Ireland are presently leading groups or presenting information connected with, or with the permission of, Courage International.

We do not provide emails to local chapters, and provide no contact information for any groups or individuals in Ireland on our website.

Coyne: *In a third email, Ms. Coyne expressed her belief that we have a presence in Ireland, insofar that there are priests in the country who teach the Courage "programme". She then asked about the resources on our Truth & Love page, and whether Courage representatives also advise young people.*

Schneible:

Just to clarify what you mean when you speak about the "Courage programme": As Father Bochanski said in a previous email, our stance is that of the Catholic Church with regard to chastity for persons who



experience same-sex attractions. This being the case, everything we do is within the parameters of official Church teaching and pastoral practice. There is, of course, a presence in Ireland of priests who support the Church's teaching on chastity.

Regarding your question about resources for minors: While we share a wide range of resources, they are not [all]* produced by us. Truth & Love is intended as a comprehensive informational hub to assist professionals and those in pastoral care who encounter people who experience SSA in their work or ministry. It is expected that anyone who works with minors does so according to the policies of their respective diocese or place of work, and the local laws. Moreover, if a priest who has been involved with Courage also happens to work with minors, that is the consequence of his particular pastoral assignment, and not of his involvement with our apostolate.

*Added to statement for clarification.

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