

# DIOCESE OF ORANGE



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Dear Brothers in Christ,

As you likely know, the Congregation for Catholic Education at the Vatican recently issued an “Instruction on the Criteria for Vocational Discernment with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of Their Admission to the Seminary and Holy Orders.” A copy of the text is included here for your reading and reflection.

As is evident by the title, the document is very narrowly focused; but many in and outside the Church see wide implications in it. Thus it is important that we know what it actually says.

The Instruction is part of a broad effort by the Church—begun at Vatican II—to improve the formation of candidates to the priesthood. It is responding to the “current situation” in which homosexuality is being discussed more openly in many societies and men, usually older, come to the seminary with a clearer sense of their own sexual orientation.

The Instruction says that candidates should not be admitted to the seminary or to Holy Orders for three reasons:

- If they are actively homosexual;
- If they have deep-seated homosexual tendencies; or
- If they support the so-called gay culture.

The first simply specifies for homosexuals what has been true for all candidates. One must demonstrate an ability to live a celibate life.

The second and third criteria require some explanation.

What is meant by deep-seated homosexual tendencies? The Instruction clearly does not mean those who may have gone through a temporary phase of homosexual attraction as part of their maturing into adulthood. Should it mean all those who have a permanent homosexual orientation? Many of us know priests, who have told us of their homosexual orientation, and are faithful to the celibate life, dedicated to the teachings of the Church and personally generous in the service of God’s people. This document does not imply that such priests are defective in any way. We know that they are not.

Central to the proper understanding of the Instruction is a concern that each candidate for Holy Orders has reached “affective maturity.” “Such maturity will allow him to relate properly with men and women, developing in him a true sense of spiritual fatherhood for the ecclesial community that will be entrusted to him.” One can and should acknowledge one’s sexual orientation. And the Instruction says that those with such tendencies “must be accepted with respect and sensitivity.” But if one’s homosexual tendencies are so “deep seated” that they

become the central focus of his self-understanding, a candidate should be judged as lacking what is needed to serve the people. This would particularly be the case with a person who finds his value and support more within the so-called gay culture than within the tradition and values of the Church. Why? Because it is clearly counter-productive to effective priestly ministry. Affective maturity has been and will continue to be fundamental to the formation of candidates for the priesthood in the Diocese of Orange.

Many people in our own culture are obsessed by the sexual; we need priests who see themselves in a wider and more mature way, whatever their sexual orientation. This is how we understand the call made by the Instruction for priests to serve as a “spiritual father” to the community entrusted to him. When Christ was among us, his proclamation of the good news held the center of attention. The scholar of antiquity, Peter Brown, put it this way: “His celibacy was an unremarkable adjunct to his prophetic calling.” It should be the same for our seminarians and priests.

The Instruction highlights the role of the spiritual director and the honesty of a candidate himself in discerning the presence or lack of the necessary affective maturity. I urge seminarians and those considering becoming seminarians to discuss these matters with their spiritual directors or confessors. I believe the issues raised in the Instruction can also be fruitfully considered by priests with their spiritual directors and within their support groups.

Central to the life of our Church are priests and candidates for the priesthood who manifest a generous portion of human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral ability, freely offered to the Lord Jesus and the Church. Let us strive for that and pray for each other as we do.

In Christ our Savior,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tod David Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tod David Brown  
Bishop of Orange  
Attachment