

**“One Human Family”
In the Heartland
With Bishop Pates**

Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation “The Joy of the Gospel” describes the companionship that we share in our Christian journey through life.

“Moreover, pastors and the lay faithful who accompany their brothers and sisters in faith and on a journey of openness to God . . . need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively occur.”

. . .

“A small step in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties. Everyone needs to be touched by the comfort and attraction of God’s saving love, which is mysteriously at work in each person, above and beyond their faults and failings.”

Shortly after Easter, Dowling Catholic High School in West Des Moines experienced strong reaction to its decision not to offer a teaching contract to an individual who was engaged to marry another man. The basis of the Dowling position is simply that a Catholic school is an extension of the Church and is expected to be faithful to a code of conduct which aligns with the Church and its mission.

Another issue which contemporaneously surfaced is what does the school do in its pastoral ministry to accompany those with same-sex attraction? The Catechism of the Catholic Church maintains that they are to be treated with respect, sensitivity and compassion. Thus was born a support group “One Human Family.”

This new group will be open for participation by individuals who sense same-sex attraction. The initiative is in accord with outreach of support and understanding that Pope Francis emphasizes embodying our evangelical call to love. In line with other groups at Dowling, this group will promote virtue.

Dr. Jerry Deegan, President of Dowling Catholic, in a letter to parents of students established clearly that the new group, as is the case of all activities at Dowling, is in keeping with the school's Catholic character.

“Let me be clear that Dowling Catholic is an extension of the Catholic Church in her teaching, doctrine and policy. The mission and purpose of One Human Family is to be an additional support to the welcoming community of Dowling Catholic High School. The goals of the group are to respect and embrace diversity in a spirit that is authentic to the mission and vision of Dowling Catholic High School, to provide additional support for strengthening student to student and faculty to student relationships at Dowling Catholic High School and to provide another opportunity for a safe place for students to share thoughts, feelings, concerns and questions.”

As oftentimes happens in the rather disjointed communications world in which we live, One Human Family, was described by some in secular terms such as gay/straight alliance or as being designed by activist groups apart from Dowling Catholic High. Dr. Deegan in his letter to parents again clearly states that is not the case: “One Human Family is not connected to any outside entity, nor is it based upon the mission of outside entities even though it has been characterized by some in the media.”

The Catholic Church already has support groups in place to accompany adults who sense same-sex attraction. One is named Courage, the other Encourage. The first, a movement which seeks to reach out to those with same sex attractions, is organized on the basis of Catholic moral principles. Among the components of Courage are fellowship, prayer and dedication, support and good example and role modeling. The second group, Encourage, is a support group for parents of children who manifest same-sex attraction. Both groups are organized in the Diocese of Des Moines and information regarding them is available on the diocesan website.

As the dust settles in the controversy that embroiled Dowling Catholic High School for a couple of weeks, two guiding principles remain intact:

- 1) To exercise respect, sensitivity and compassion for individuals in situations that require understanding and support. (Ref. Catechism of the Catholic Church)
- 2) To remain faithful to the clear teaching of the Catholic Church on moral issues.