

Pastoral Response to Those Who Experience Sexual or Relational Brokenness, Including but Not Limited to SSA

In my time as a priest, I have worked with many people who have been wounded by offenses committed against them through sexual manipulation. Sadly, many people are unaware of the help the Church offers in this area of human struggle. Too often, the truth and assistance the Church provides are drowned out by a secular narrative that claims the Church seeks to limit freedom through outdated morality. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Church does not constrain freedom; rather, she ennobles it by freeing us from our past sins and healing us in the present.

The Church's teaching on human sexuality is among the most beautiful teachings offered by any institution in the world. Her reverence for sexual love and for the dignity and integrity of the human person is second to none. Unfortunately, many people do not know or appreciate the profound beauty of what the Church teaches. It is also true that the Church herself has not always done a sufficient job of promoting the ways she can help those who experience same-sex attraction or other forms of sexual or relational brokenness. While secular society promoted a narrative portraying the Church as inflexible and unwelcoming, it also advanced a distorted view of human sexuality through the sexual revolution, which has harmed millions of people. Amid these cultural upheavals, the Church was not always able to respond effectively or quickly enough to a confused notion of human sexuality. Now is the time to rediscover the freedom and beauty the Church offers us all in the area of human sexuality.

There are many Christian groups across the country that help people integrate their sexuality in a healthy and faithful way. In my research, one group has stood out because of its holistic and compassionate approach: Desert Streams. What I particularly appreciate about this ministry is that, while it seeks to help those who experience SSA, it does not treat the person who experiences SSA as fundamentally different from anyone else who struggles with some aspect of human sexuality.

Human sexuality is both beautiful and complex, and for some people, it takes greater effort to understand and embrace it within the challenging teachings of Jesus and His Church. Desert Streams does not focus exclusively on those who experience SSA; rather, it seeks to help all people. Its founder understands same-sex attraction as one of many challenges a person may face in our modern era. He believes that individuals who struggle with SSA or any other form of sexual or relational brokenness can support one another, because healing often occurs within a community that is willing to walk together.

Andrew Comiskey, the founder of Desert Streams, lived a promiscuous lifestyle for several years while experiencing SSA. Through his conversion to Christianity, he became convinced that God's grace can heal every part of the human person. God's grace does not heal only relationships or past sins; it touches every dimension of who we are, including our sexuality. While this healing does not mean one will no longer experience temptation—even temptations that are intrinsically disordered—it does mean that one's sexuality can be integrated within the reality of our bodies as male and female, in fidelity to God's design.

In response to the needs of those who experience SSA, as well as anyone who struggles with sexual or relational brokenness, our parish is beginning a chapter of Desert Streams / Living Waters. This confidential support group is designed to help individuals achieve greater integration and healing in the area of human sexuality, regardless of their particular struggle. This spring, we will begin a pilot group of approximately ten participants. The group will be a confidential spiritual support group for men and women, age 18 and older, who are seeking to integrate their sexual or relational struggles within the teachings of the Church. Two members of our parish have completed the required training and formation to serve as facilitators. Due to the confidential nature of this ministry, meeting times and locations will not be published in the bulletin.

If you are interested in learning more or attending one of these groups, I invite you to contact me or one of the group leaders at the email address listed below.

philomena@qas.org

For additional information about this ministry, please visit:

www.desertstreams.org/who-we-are

Peace,
Fr. Dave