



Dear Sister, Associate, Companion and Friend,

The Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Work Group (SOGI) invites you into the next phase of deepening our communal dialogue around SOGI issues. This phase focuses on sexual orientation. We are delighted to draw you into this next conversation through videos and a community reflection and dialogue process. To be faithful to the call in our Chapter 2017 Recommitment to engage SOGI issues through education and dialogue, every heart and voice matters. So... come with an open heart; click some links; do some personal reflection; find some friends who like to talk—and we're off!

This second phase of the community conversation focusing on sexual orientation builds on the first conversation about sexuality launched in 2019. For that conversation, we watched and discussed videos from psychologist Lynn Levo, CSJ. We made an agreement with her that the sharing of her video presentation would be limited to Sisters of Mercy. (If you missed those videos and you are a sister, email [SOGI@sistersofmercy.org](mailto:SOGI@sistersofmercy.org) to get the private link and catch up.) Moving into the present, we are sharing the videos relating to the sexual orientation conversation with the Mercy family because we believe dialogue among a mix of sisters, associates and companions will enrich us all.

The current conversation flows from a SOGI event held in Detroit on September 14, 2019. Since the thousands of us could not quite fit into the event room in Farmington Hills, we are inviting you into the experience by sharing six video segments from that day, plus suggested reflection and dialogue processes to unpack them. The event featured two panels. In the morning, four Mercy women told their stories of being a woman of Mercy who identifies as LGBTQ, or who has close family relationships with those who identify as LGBTQ. Each spoke poignantly about her personal experience. These presentations are divided into three twenty-minute video segments, totaling an hour. In the afternoon, a panel of

three experts from the fields of sociology, philosophy, and theology provided input about sexual orientation from their unique lenses. These presentations are also divided into three twenty- minute segments, totaling an hour.

We have developed a reflection process to engage the three morning video segments ([video 1](#), [video 2](#), [video 3](#)), and a different reflection process to engage the three afternoon video segments ([video 4](#), [video 5](#), [video 6](#)). Each process involves watching the videos, your personal reflection, and group dialogue. Please feel free to use as is, adapt, or create your very own way to engage the panels. Our approach is to give you several suggestions with the aim of stimulating a lively conversation about how these panelists move you as an individual, and us as a community. Use whatever works best for you and your context.

The group part of the processes are designed to either work in an intimate conversation circle, or at a table at a larger gathering. Perhaps you'd like to gather at an individual house, a larger convent, a school, or on-line. We have five tips to get you started:

- Preview each of the reflection and dialogue processes to get a sense of how much time *you* desire to spend watching the videos and doing personal reflection before group conversation;
- Schedule your group conversations with enough lead-time to account for variations in the time different people will take with the initial stages of each process;
- We encourage you to have two group conversations (one to engage each panel) between now and June 30, 2020;
- We suggest that someone in each group takes the initiative to lead the prayer/arrange music and facilitate the conversation, as needed;
- If you know a senior sister who does not have computer access, please think about how you can share the videos with her and print out the reflection materials.

SOGI has also included feedback sheets for your group to complete and return to us. We really wish we were able to participate in each of your conversations—but alas- feedback sheets will have to do. Or, if your group is moved to provide a window into your conversation via a more creative medium (maybe you want to send us a video!), SOGI is certainly game. We ask you to provide your feedback on both group conversations no later than June 30, 2020. Phase 3 on gender

identity is going to follow in fall of 2020, so we want to get as many people as possible engaged now in phase 2.

Peace and Blessings,

Betsy, Karen, Mary Kay, Mary and Jen

## **Lived Experience – Panel 1 Process**

Before diving into the below process, you may want to take a sneak peek at its various movements to help you engage in it most fully. It begins with an experience and moves to individual reflection, sharing with others, group reflection, and looking into the future together. Jesus tells us: “‘To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch of dough was leavened.’” (Lk 13:20-21 NAB). Just as baking bread involves several steps and yields wondrous, delicious results, we hope engaging this reflection process will help you incrementally move into deeper awarenesses about yourself, our community and the emerging “Kin-dom.”

### **Movement 1:**

#### **A Blessing of Story: Choosing the Recipe**

Reverence the ancient art of storytelling. Stories stir and awaken us. Stories connect our hearts and beckon us to lean into holy mystery. Stories reveal a piece of the storyteller’s sacred truth. As you prepare to receive and engage the stories of four women of Mercy, first pause to consider:

- Would I listen most attentively if I watch the videos alone, or with other people?
- Would I listen most attentively if I watch the three video segments in one sitting? Each segment is about 20 minutes. Or, would I listen most attentively if I take breaks between the segments, or perhaps watch them over a number of days?

### **Movement 2:**

#### **Getting Personal: Combining the Ingredients**

Before launching the videos, take 5 minutes of quiet to center yourself. Do I need to let go of anything to help me arrive “here,” ready to receive the gift of an other’s story? Perhaps call to mind a piece of the story of someone you personally know who identifies as LGBTQ. Honor this person. Or, perhaps just rest in the loving presence of God.

“The faithful will abide with God in love, for grace and mercy are upon God’s holy ones, and God watches over these who are God's own.”

(Wis 3:9)

***Watch videos... and continue to Movement 3***

- [Video 1](#)
- [Video 2](#)
- [Video 3](#)

OR, if you chose to watch the videos at various intervals:

Perhaps before launching the second video, take 5 minutes to sit with Dr. Brené Brown’s insight: “We cultivate love when we allow our most vulnerable and powerful selves to be deeply seen and known, and when we honor the spiritual connection grown from that offering with trust, respect, kindness and affection.” (Taken from The Gifts of Imperfection). Meditate on your own vulnerability, allowing yourself to be deeply seen by God. Perhaps listen to the song “known” by Tauren Wells. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xckDgX8xNfg> Ask yourself: Does tapping into my own sense of being known help me more authentically connect with the story of another?

“The faithful will abide with God in love, for grace and mercy are upon God’s holy ones, and God watches over these who are God's own.”

Perhaps before launching the third video, take 5 minutes to pray for members of the LGBTQ community who have been misunderstood, hurt, ostracized, rejected, bullied or persecuted. Studies have shown that LGBTQ youth are over three times more likely to attempt suicide as their heterosexual peers. (Roiders October 8, 2018). Honor their memories. In Jamaica and Guyana, consensual same-sex relations remain criminalized and punishable with a prison sentence. (See U.S. State Department Country Human Rights Reports). Same-sex relations are criminalized in about 70 countries, including by the death penalty in several countries. (See ILGA report on state-sponsored homophobia, Dec. 10, 2019, available at <https://ilga.org/state-sponsored-homophobia-report>). Pray for justice, safety and the dignity of all.

“The faithful will abide with God in love, for grace and mercy are upon God’s holy ones, and God watches over these who are God's own.”

### **Movement 3:**

#### **Reflecting on What I've Heard: Waiting for Leavened Dough to Rise**

##### Questions for personal reflection:

1. What emotions arise in me as I listen to these stories?
2. What did I hear that resonated within me?
3. Did I hear anything that I resist? Something that challenges me?
4. Did I hear anything that surprised me?
5. Regardless of my own sexual orientation, can I acknowledge how “heteronormativity” influences how I hear these stories?

(Note: Heteronormativity is the common assumption that all people are heterosexual and that it is the normative sexual orientation of healthy, good, natural and holy people. Heteronormative beliefs contribute to heterosexism, which is the individual and institutionalized prejudice and discrimination against people who identify as LGBTQ).

### **Optional Movement 4:**

#### **Conversation in Pairs: Baking in the Oven**

This suggestion is totally optional. If talking to another person helps you process what you're thinking and feeling, find a buddy and have a conversation about the fruits of your personal reflection. Sometimes, it is not possible to go as deep as we would like in a large group due to varying levels of comfort and time constraints. If it would help you to have a one-on-one deeper conversation with a friend, confidant, mentor or spiritual director, this Movement 4 suggestion is for you. If it's not helpful, or you don't feel close enough with anyone to speak on a deeper level on this topic... don't do it!

## Movement 5:

### Gathering with 7-10 People of Mercy: Breaking Bread

#### Opening Prayer:

Merciful God, you are with us always.  
You tenderly enfold each of us in your love.  
We reverence your loving presence  
Alive in each person in this circle;  
Alive in all peoples of this town or city;  
Alive in all peoples of the Earth;  
And alive in all of Creation.  
Bless our time together this day.  
Amen.

#### Play Song: Choose one of the below songs:

“For All the Children” ~ David Lohman <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2oT9JiMWEI>

“Dame Tus Ojos” ~ by Jesus Adrian Romero, Marcela Gándara  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQOExSx5HF0>

“Song of the Body of Christ” ~ Marty Haugen, David Haas, Joe Camacho & Rory Cooney [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hI\\_Oz\\_PpejU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hI_Oz_PpejU)

“Gracias a la Vida” ~ by Violeta Para, sung by Mercedes Sosa  
<https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=tightropetb&p=gracias+a+la+vida+mercedes+soas#id=52&vid=594da594c621d34d6018a93438b98600&action=view>

“Singing for Our Lives” ~ Holly Near  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=johabhyURIw>

“Born This Way” ~ Lady Gaga <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Vzrr64ZrVU>

#### Reading 1: By Hildegard of Bingen

I, the fiery light of divine wisdom, I ignite  
the beauty of the plains, I sparkle the  
waters. I burn the sun and the moon and the

stars. With wisdom I order all rightly. I  
adorn the earth. I am the breeze that  
nurtures all things green. I am the rain  
coming from the dew that causes the grasses  
to laugh with the joy of life. I call forth  
tears, the aroma of holy work. I am the  
yearning for good.

**Antiphon:**

The faithful will abide with God in love, for grace and mercy are upon God's holy ones, and God watches over these who are God's own. (Wisdom 3:9)

**Reading 2:** Lk 14:15-23 (NAB)

One of his fellow guests on hearing this said to [Jesus], "Blessed is the one who will dine in the kingdom of God."

He replied to him, "A man gave a great dinner to which he invited many. But one by one, they all began to excuse themselves. The first said to him, 'I have purchased a field and must go to examine it; I ask you, consider me excused.' And another said, 'I have purchased five yoke of oxen and am on my way to evaluate them; I ask you, consider me excused.' And another said, 'I have just married a woman, and therefore I cannot come.'

The servant went and reported this to his master. Then the master of the house in a rage commanded his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in here the poor and the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

The servant reported, 'Sir, your orders have been carried out and still there is room.' The master then ordered the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedgerows and make people come in that my home may be filled.'

**Antiphon:**

The faithful will abide with God in love, for grace and mercy are upon God's holy ones, and God watches over these who are God's own. (Wisdom 3:9)

**Quiet Reflection:**

Take several minutes of silence to reflect on the below questions for group sharing:

1. What touched you the most in the panel stories of the four women of Mercy?



2. Have you gained any new understandings, awarenesses or perspectives from listening to their stories?
3. What learnings might the Mercy community glean from the panel presentations? Are we open and receptive to these learnings?
4. How do you believe heteronormative attitudes influence the ways we, as individuals, a mercy community and the human family, treat people who identify as LGBTQ?
5. What is emerging in your group regarding a future direction for mercy's education, dialogue or action around sexual orientation?

### **Engaging in Dialogue:**

Take good time to engage one another in dialogue around your responses to the videos and the questions for group sharing. Speak from your heart; listen deeply. What do you hear emerging among us?

### **Closing prayer:**

Gracious Host of the Feast,  
you invite all people into your home.  
We rejoice in receiving your open invitation,  
and we savor the embrace of your warm welcome.  
You nourish us with the food of reflection  
and the drink of conversation.  
You fill us with the flame of hope  
and a yearning for justice.  
Empower us to embody your model of inclusive love;  
That we may welcome and nourish one another  
in our community and in our world.  
Amen.



## **Building Useful Foundations – Process for Panel 2**

Before diving into the below process, you may want to take a sneak peek at its various movements to help you engage in it most fully. It begins with an experience and moves to individual reflection, sharing with others, group reflection, and looking into the future together. Jesus tells us: “’d’s’What is the kingdom of God like? To what can I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that a person took and planted in the garden. When it was fully grown, it became a large bush and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches.” (Lk 13:18-19 NAB). Just as growing a plant from seeds involves several patient steps and results in an amazing new creation, we hope engaging this reflection process will help you incrementally move into deeper awarenesses about yourself, our community and the emerging “Kin-dom.”

### **Movement 1:**

#### **Preparing My Heart and Mind: Tilling the Soil**

The human person and the societies we construct are astonishingly complex. There are so many dimensions to who we are as individuals, and who we become when we organize into groups. Patience, attention and good information are prerequisites for trying to decode it all. When we don’t pay attention to important questions, or we rely on shoddy information, we give misunderstandings, poor reasoning, and ruptures in relationship a chance to creep in. Particularly in current times, ferreting out fact from fiction and vetting reliable sources can be tricky. In this second panel, three experts from the fields of sociology, philosophy and theology illuminate dimensions of sexual orientation through their respective professional lenses. As you prepare to open your mind to these presentations, first pause to consider:

- Would I listen most attentively if I watch the videos alone, or with other people?
- Would I listen most attentively if I watch the three video segments in one sitting? Each segment is about 20 minutes. Or, would I listen most attentively if I take breaks between the segments, or perhaps watch them over a number of days?

## Movement 2:

### Expert Perspectives: Planting Seeds

Before launching the videos, take 5 minutes of quiet to center yourself. Consider: What do I ‘think I know’ about sexual orientation from the lens of sociology? From philosophy? From theology? Acknowledge what I think I know and keep an open mind to hear new or different information. If music helps you center, perhaps sit with the song “Wisdom, Wisdom” by Lori True  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pm\\_blA3U2jg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pm_blA3U2jg)

“And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: ‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.’ And he replied: ‘Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.’” (Excerpt from “God Knows” by Minnie Haskins)

*Watch videos... and continue to Movement 3.*

- [Video 4](#)
- [Video 5](#)
- [Video 6](#)

OR, if you chose to watch the videos at various intervals:

Perhaps before launching the second video, take 5 minutes to sit with the poem “The Journey” from The House of Belonging by David Whyte. Google the text or listen to David Whyte recite his poem:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8q6WJ52oDc>

And perhaps before launching the third video, spend 5 minutes with a reflection by Richard Rohr entitled: “Wide-Eyed Seeing Theme: Gender and Sexuality.”  
[https://cac.org/wide-eyed-seeing-2019-10-20/?utm\\_source=cac.org&utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_campaign=dm&utm\\_content=summary](https://cac.org/wide-eyed-seeing-2019-10-20/?utm_source=cac.org&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=dm&utm_content=summary)

(Only available in English).

[Here is a link to handout for Mary Hunt’s talk](#)- Video #3, if you would like to help your reflections.

### **Movement 3:**

#### **Reflecting on What I've Heard: Waiting for Seeds to Germinate**

##### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. What did I hear that resonated within me? That confirmed what I knew?
2. Did I hear anything that I resist? Something new or different that challenged me?
3. Did I hear anything that surprised me?
4. And... so what? Does something I heard invite me to think differently or nudge me to change in some way?
5. What invitation might there be for the Mercy community?

OR: You may choose to do a theological reflection to help integrate your head and heart:

- Start from your experience of engaging the personal stories from Panel 1. Perhaps take the story that most deeply spoke to you. Recall the emotions you felt and how you noticed God revealing God's self through your encounter with that person's story.
- How does each of the experts' perspectives shed light on the cultural and social context of your experience?
- What themes from our theological tradition are at work? What surfaces for you? (Perhaps it is a Bible verse, wisdom from the early church, a nugget from Mercy spirituality, a Church teaching, etc.).
- Ask yourself: So what is God doing here? How am I affected by who God is and what God is doing? What does this piece of our tradition suggest about God's purposes for the world? And about my place in realizing God's purposes for the world?
- How do I live out my relationship with God? Am I being called to something different, a shift in behavior, a change in belief, something confirmed, further reflection?

## Optional Movement 4:

### Conversation in Pairs: Watering Seeds, Pulling Up Weeds

This suggestion is totally optional. If talking to another person helps you process what you're thinking and feeling, find a buddy and have a conversation about the fruits of your personal reflection. Sometimes, it is not possible to go as deep as we would like in a large group due to varying levels of comfort and time constraints. If it would help you to have a one-on-one deeper conversation with a friend, confidant, mentor or spiritual director, this Movement 4 suggestion is for you. If it's not helpful... don't do it!

## Movement 5:

### Gathering with 7-10 People of Mercy: Harvesting Good Fruit

**Opening Prayer:** Excerpt from "Fragments of Your Ancient Name" by Joyce Rupp

“Wake us up  
To what needs doing, and what needs undoing.  
Wake us up  
To what must be let go, and what to draw closer.  
Wake us up  
To what enlarges love, and what diminishes it.  
In all parts of our life.  
Disturb and wake us up.”  
Amen.

**Play Song:** Choose one of the below songs:

“I am Willing” ~ Holly Near ~

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AkGk5maD8Q>

“Cristo Libertador” ~ Carmelo Erdozain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpEEed8S3nPc>

“We’ll Build a World” ~ David Lohman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOtHBYiX8nQ>

“Solo Le Pido a Dios” ~ by Leon Gieco, sung by Mercedes Sosa

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIrot1Flczg>

“One Heart, One Mind” ~ David Haas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odm6UvbDDps>

**Reading 1:** Excerpt from “Breath of the Soul: Reflections on Prayer” by Joan Chittister

“[V]ery few things can really be forced before their time. Love cannot be forced. Growth cannot be forced. Understanding cannot be forced. Acceptance cannot be forced... those things germinate in darkness until ripeness comes – either in them or in us.”

**Antiphon:**

Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. (Matt 11:29)

**Reading 2:** Mk 4:3-8 (NAB)

Hear this! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep. And when the sun rose, it was scorched and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it and it produced no grain. And some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit. It came up and grew and yielded thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.

**Antiphon:**

Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. (Matt 11:29)

**Reading 3:** Excerpted from *Union and Charity*, by Denise Colgan, RSM and Doris Gottemoeller, RSM

“Sisters of Mercy are well aware that our very name is not only a historical gift of God, but a daily summons to be what we say we are, with as much integrity as God's own Mercy will enable us to muster. Learning to be merciful is a life-long endeavor. It begins with learning from Jesus himself who asks us all to ‘Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart’ (Matt. 11:29). We learn

by doing, by taking his yoke upon our own shoulders. The yoke of Jesus Christ always involves solidarity and burden-sharing with him, and like him, with all who are heavily laden. Genuine yoke-sharing will often call for dogged patience with the load, whether our own or others', and at times, a persistent public voice as we try to lighten the load of others. The yoke is not always comfortable or applauded, though it is 'easy' and 'light' if shouldered with Jesus Christ (Matt. 11:30).

Another central aspect of what Catherine McAuley would call 'Mercy spirituality' is the desire to 'resemble' Jesus in our own time and place— not to copy his long garments and sandals, or ride donkeys because he did so in first-century Palestine, but to 'follow' him, to let his life live within us. Over and over she invites us:

Be always striving to make yourselves like our blessed Lord; endeavor to resemble Him in some one thing at least, so that any person who sees you or speaks with you may be reminded of His sacred life on earth' ... Together we count on God's abiding help as we 'rejoice in the continued invitation to seek justice, to be compassionate, and to reflect mercy to the world' (Constitutions, par. 84).

**Antiphon:**

Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. (Matt 11:29)

**Quiet Reflection:**

Take several minutes of silence to reflect on the below questions for group sharing:

1. What most caught your attention in the expert panel presentations?
2. Have you gained any new understandings, awarenesses or perspectives from listening to the expert panel's presentations?
3. What learnings might the Mercy community glean from the expert panel presentations? Are we open and receptive to these learnings?
4. What questions do you still have about sexual orientation?

**Engaging in Dialogue:**

Take good time to engage one another in dialogue around your responses to the videos and the questions for group sharing. Speak from your heart; listen deeply. What do you hear emerging among us?



**Closing prayer:**

O God of the Harvest,  
You work in darkness to bring forth new life.  
You unite the branches of all our dreams  
In the One Vine.  
Gift us with desire  
To deeply root ourselves in your ways.  
Gift us with faithfulness  
To stay with growing pains.  
Gift us with patience  
To wait for ripeness.  
Gift us with awe  
To delight in the buds of new growth.  
Near the close of this day,  
Bless our work and relationships.  
Amen.

**Movement 6:**

**Feedback Sheet for Process 2: Sharing Our Bounty**

Please return this sheet to [SOGI@sistersofmercy.org](mailto:SOGI@sistersofmercy.org) by June 30, 2020.

1. Please name the people who met for conversation:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What three insights from your conversation group does the Mercy family need to hear?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Did your conversation group encounter any challenges? (Either challenges presented by the expert panel's presentations or challenges in talking openly about sexual orientation, etc.)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Did any questions emerge in your conversation group?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Are there ways the SOGI Work Group can be more helpful to you and your local community?

*Faithful Perspectives on Sexual Orientation*  
**Notes by Mary E. Hunt, September 14, 2019**  
**Mercy Center, Farmington, Hills, MI**

Theologizing: the process of asking and answering questions of ultimate meaning and value

1. *Social location*

Social location is crucial to doing theology. Where we live, the color of our skin, our sexual orientation and gender identity, our education, ethnicity, and other human experiences all shape our theologies. I begin as a white, US, upper educated, upper middle class Catholic lesbian married with a child living in an urban area.

Think about where you start and how that conditions what you believe, how you understand the world, the divine/God, and right relationship which form the heart of theology. Think about where most church theologians and unelected church leaders start. No one starting point deserves privileged status. Nonetheless, a few people exercise such privilege in shaping our community's official theology. It is not fair and does not work. Theology is not one-size-fits all.

2. *Major issues are methodological as well as content-focused*

Catechism vs. community-based approaches

++What **sources** do we take as relevant for doing theology? Include experiences, social and biological sciences as well as scripture and tradition.

++Who/what is an **authority**? Authority governs not only *whose* experiences are taken seriously, but *how* competing views are treated. If there is only one authoritative view, then that view holds sway when it comes to things Catholic. But if there are many authorities, beginning with the people who live the experience, and including academic and pastoral people who work in relevant fields, people from other religious traditions who explain how same-sex love coheres with their faith perspectives, etc. then there will be more than one Catholic view.

++ Theology admits of a **variety** of views, an openness to a range of ways of seeing the world, God, and what it means to live in right relationship. The task is

not persuading one another of **the new correct** position, but finding ways to live with the many forms of human flourishing. That is a major change of method and a major challenge to prevailing power structures.

Conclusion: Theologizing is not for the faint of heart. Ideas do not change quickly. But engaging in such conversations is an act of faith, a work of mercy, and a step toward justice.

### *3. One example of new methods applied*

Educators at Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School in Washington, DC, run by the Salesian Sisters of the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, came into conflict with Roman Catholic institutional theology/authorities when they decided to publish news of alumnae same-sex weddings. Monastery Superior & President Emerita, Sister Mary Berchmans Hannon, VHM. in a May 2019 letter to alums wrote:

“As a professed Sister of the Visitation for 67 years, I have devoted my life in service the Catholic Church. The Church is clear in its teaching on same-sex marriages. But, it is equally clear in its teaching that we are all children of God, that we each have dignity and are worthy of respect and love... As I have prayed over this contradiction, I keep returning to this choice: we can focus on Church teaching on gay marriage or we can focus on Church teaching on the Gospel commandment of love. We know from history - including very recent history - that the Church, in its humanity, makes mistakes. Yet, through the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, it learns and grows. And so, we choose the Gospel commandment of love. Beginning with the fall issue of our alumnae magazine, we will publish news of our alumnae’s same-sex unions, along with all updates our alums choose to share with their classmates. We reached this decision as a school and Monastery leadership after much prayerful consideration and thoughtful dialogue. We welcomed - as we always do - the respectful, earnest, faith-filled comments of several community members who contacted us directly. We encourage each of you to reach out to us when you have a question or concern. We all can grow through these courageous conversations.”

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/sister-mary-berchmanss-letter-on-allowing-news-of-same-sex-unions-to-appear-in-alum-magazine/2019/05/13/370eb108-736b-11e9-9f06-5fc2ee80027a\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.a98a13752c43](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/sister-mary-berchmanss-letter-on-allowing-news-of-same-sex-unions-to-appear-in-alum-magazine/2019/05/13/370eb108-736b-11e9-9f06-5fc2ee80027a_story.html?utm_term=.a98a13752c43)

4. How are Mercy and friends to *live out inclusive, embracing, empowering Catholic theologies especially with regard to sexual orientation?*

“Do not expect of the institutional Church that which it is constitutionally incapable of doing. You will only be frustrated.” Theresa Kane, RSM

It is unrealistic to expect that Rome will revise Catholic theology on sexual orientation any time soon. More likely, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith may codify the theological trial balloon launched recently by the Congregation for Catholic Education (February 2, 2019) “‘Male and Female He Created Them’: Toward a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education.” Trans and intersex people are the primary targets of this new document with so-called “gender ideology” as the culprit. Meeting such documents with counter positions will only keep us very busy on the institution’s terms.

With real people’s lives in the balance, the survival and thriving of LGBTIQ persons require new ways of developing our community’s theologies:

- A. Identify and share our respective and diverse *starting points*.
- B. Engage in critical exploration of the many *sources* that ground theological reflection, especially experience, the social and biological sciences, along with communal prayer and discernment.
- C. Rethink who and what is authentically *authoritative*.
- D. Explore the *variety* of ways of thinking and believing that demonstrate that we are truly ‘catholic’ in a universal church that honors a range of views within and among religious people.

Conclusion:

By shifting the theological model to become more inclusive, more participatory, more flexible and forgiving, as we live with positions we do not share as the price of having our views accepted as well, we have the possibility of creating a church that reflects the Gospel and a world that is safer and more pleasurable for all.