



RESPONDING IN LOVE AND RESPECT

**Statements on the profound recognition of the dignity of
each person and the sacredness of human sexuality**



**PROVIDENCE
COLLEGE**



Dear Members of the Providence College Community,

In April 2023, Providence College celebrated the 20th anniversary of the founding of SHEPARD (Stopping Homophobia; Eliminating Prejudice; and Restoring Dignity). This organization was established as a resource to members of our community who identify as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning) and as a reminder of the dignity to which all are entitled as beloved children of God. This call to honor, love, and respect each member of our community is expressed powerfully in the College’s Mission Statement:

Providence College seeks to reflect the rich diversity of the human family. Following the example of St. Dominic, who extended a loving embrace to all, it welcomes qualified men and women of every background and affirms the God-given dignity, freedom, and equality of each person. Providence College promotes the common good, the human flourishing of each member of the campus community, and service of neighbors near and far.

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Providence College
Mission Statement

Many in our community have sought clarity on the College’s commitment to love and honor those in the Friar Family who identify as LGBTQ, while at the same time remaining faithful to the traditions and teachings of the Catholic Church on human sexuality. Fidelity to these teachings is at times difficult for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. The challenges have become even more acute as societal norms have changed and as more and more people have questioned and even rejected Church teachings on these difficult matters. As a Catholic and Dominican college committed to veritas, it is essential that we navigate these challenges with compassion, mutual respect, and open dialogue.

Over the last few years, we have developed a theological foundations document that clearly presents the teachings of the Catholic Church on human sexuality, that could be shared with the campus community, and that would serve as the basis for an institutional statement on responding in love to the members of our community who identify as LGBTQ. The Foundations document is the result of years of collaboration between the Offices of Mission and Ministry and DEI, the Diversity Committee of the Board of Trustees, and Catholic theologians, including Dominican Friars. Both the institutional statement and the Foundations document are included in this file.

I wish to reaffirm my commitment to making Providence College a more just and loving community. Doing so will require addressing the causes for the hurt, bias, and injustice to which some members of our community have been subjected. We do this because the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the consistent teaching of the Catholic Church demand this of us. While these statements will provide a foundation upon which to build, I recognize that this is but another step in our journey toward becoming a Beloved Community. Next, we will introduce an ongoing series of conversations to guide us in operationalizing these concepts. I have tasked the Offices of Mission and Ministry and DEI to lead these efforts, and I will remain engaged deeply in this process.

I recognize that you might have some questions about the purposes of these documents and their function in our community. We have put together an FAQ page at the end of this booklet to help address some of the more common questions we anticipate.

I share this work with a sense of humility and gratitude to the members of the Friar Family who have waited patiently and who have provided invaluable insight into the creation of these statements.

Respectfully,

Rev. Kenneth R. Sicard, O.P.
College President

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FR. KENNETH SICARD, OP
PRESIDENT, PROVIDENCE COLLEGE



RESPONDING IN **LOVE & RESPECT**

**Our Commitment to Members of our Community
Identifying as LGBTQ**

At the very heart of our mission as a Catholic and Dominican college is the mandate to affirm the God-given dignity, freedom, and equality of each person, and to promote the common good and the human flourishing of every member of our community. This is articulated beautifully in our College Mission Statement. Jesus' command to love one another enflamed the heart of St. Dominic and led him to extend a loving embrace to all. This sacred heritage has been passed down to us, and we aspire to love one another in the same way. Our shared commitment to becoming more loving, just, and equitable — a Beloved Community — must motivate and animate what we do and how we live.

AFFIRMING THE INHERENT DIGNITY OF ALL

It is no secret that we live in a rapidly secularizing age that challenges the Church's understanding of the human person and human sexuality. More and more we find that there are deep conflicts between Catholic and secular accounts of these realities. For some, questions about sex and gender take on the significance of adjudicating whether Providence College is still committed to its Catholic identity. When this happens, members of our community who identify as LGBTQ are often made to shoulder the burdens of these challenges, unfairly caught up in controversial questions about institutional fidelity to our Catholic and Dominican mission and identity. This is wrong and it is unjust to our LGBTQ community members.

Others rather suggest that Catholic moral teaching is prejudicial to members of our community who identify as LGBTQ. We as an institution refute the claim that Catholic teaching is prejudicial. Indeed, Catholic moral teaching asserts the inherent dignity of all members of this community, condemns unjust discrimination against anyone, and welcomes all into the full embrace of worship and fellowship and the universal call to holiness. It is for this reason that our vice presidents for mission and ministry and DEI and their colleagues work tirelessly together to tailor an approach to these difficult and sensitive issues that flow from the mission of Providence College.

A SENSITIVE AND PASTORAL APPROACH

We recognize that our approach to sensitive issues surrounding human sexuality and gender will differ significantly from the approach taken by public universities and even by some other Catholic colleges and faith-based institutions. Our approach at Providence College must remain faithful to and be informed by the Catholic Church's vision of the human person and human sexuality. Anything less would be inconsistent with our Catholic identity, and therefore unacceptable. Our hope is that this statement will provide some much-needed clarity and a direction for moving forward as a community to answer some of the most challenging questions before us.

This Statement and the Theological Foundations document that follows provide a foundation for a sensitive and respectful approach to the members of our community who identify as LGBTQ. We are deeply indebted to numerous faculty and staff who contributed to the writing and editing of the Theological Foundations document, which we invite you to read and reflect upon in its entirety. To chart a way forward, we have identified a framework below for responding lovingly to the members of our community who identify as LGBTQ. The framework identifies major principles which will help guide us and discusses the steps we will be taking to respond to the challenges before us as well as those that doubtlessly will arise in the future. Much of this Statement is derived from the Theological Foundations document, and the underlined portions are direct quotes.



PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE US

01 We recognize and appreciate deeply the contributions and the intrinsic value of the LGBTQ-identifying members of our community. As reflected in the College Mission Statement, the College “welcomes qualified men and women of every background and affirms the God-given dignity, freedom, and equality of each person.” We see each of you as a beloved child of God, a beloved member of the Friar Family, and your lived experiences and identities do not compromise that in any way.

02 We affirm and applaud SHEPARD’s stated mission to “stop homophobia, eliminate prejudice, and restore dignity.” The College will work with SHEPARD in this shared goal.

03 We recognize and regret that some members of the Friar Family who identify as LGBTQ have often been made to feel invisible and have been marginalized, including in the name of Catholic teaching. This is unacceptable, in that the Catholic Church clearly defends the inviolable dignity of every human person as beloved of God. As a result, the College deplores any offenses against that fundamental human dignity and calls for all its members to show true compassion and goodwill toward one another.... It is particularly crucial for us as a Catholic and Dominican community that all our members understand that Church teaching in no way justifies or supports any form of shaming or condemnation on the basis of sexual orientation.

04 We recognize how some individuals and organizations have expressed confusion and frustration, particularly when planning events or inviting speakers to campus. Members of our community who identify as LGBTQ often feel that they are held to greater scrutiny and different standards than other individuals and groups. Though some student groups, some divisions, and academic departments have dealt with some of these matters, for the most part, College leadership has not addressed them, except when they have bubbled over into controversies that had to be engaged. This has caused undue stress and negative attention on these members of our community in ways we regret. This same silence has meant that those who have sought to proclaim Catholic teaching on human sexuality have also been marginalized and accused of hate speech.

SHEPARD, other clubs and organizations, and individuals are in no way prohibited from scheduling speakers and events. However, as a Catholic and Dominican college, we cannot endorse or allow events, activities, or initiatives that are inconsistent with the College’s Catholic identity, nor can we endorse or support affiliations with organizations whose principal activities and ideologies are in opposition to the moral teachings of the Church. This is not limited to any particular club or organization or community members but applies to all PC organizations and constituents. These guidelines are not meant to infringe upon academic freedom, and faculty are encouraged to explore controversial issues in their classes or in other academic settings as provided for in the Faculty Handbook and the College’s Outside Speaker Policy.

PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE US

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Consistent with perennial Church teaching calling each person to chastity according to his or her state in life, and as reflected in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (#2357), the College can neither condone nor support sexual activity outside of the marital relationship between one man and one woman, or any sexual activities that “close the sexual act to the gift of life.” This is true of everyone, regardless of sexual orientation.... It may seem strange, but the Church holds together both the sinfulness of non-marital sexual acts and the dignity and belovedness of those who might choose them. For Christians who identify as LGBTQ, as for all Christians, a failure to live chastely in no way impinges on the belovedness and dignity of the persons concerned. The call to chastity presents a challenge for most Christians, particularly when we first try to answer that call. It is crucial that we cultivate a campus culture where every person is valued and respected as they are. We also recognize and state affirmatively that individuals should not be defined by sexual activity.

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The College’s approach to DEI issues must be motivated by the Scriptural call to love of God and neighbor. When the great Dominican saint and scholar St. Thomas Aquinas wrote about the Christian life, he noted that caritas, usually translated as love or charity, is so central to the Christian life of holiness and virtue that it should motivate our every action, shape our character and our very selves, and direct our lives to the love of God and neighbor and all things in their proper order and relation.... Commitment to veritas and caritas marked the life of Dominic and continues to shape the Order of Preachers. Standing in that tradition, Providence College aims to be a Beloved Community, one deeply formed by a collective commitment to both veritas and caritas, to the pursuit of truth and the embodiment of well-ordered love.

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We will create opportunities for informed and charitable dialogue on these sensitive issues to increase understanding and ensure that all members of our community receive the dignity and respect demanded by the Church and by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.





THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

**A Synopsis of Catholic Teaching on the Human
Person and Human Sexuality**



At Providence College, our Catholic and Dominican identity grounds our institution and shapes who we aspire to be. Working in the tradition of St. Dominic, our guidance and inspiration come from his life and that of the religious order he founded. St. Dominic's passion for truth drove him to study both sacred Scripture and the liberal arts early in his life. Later, Dominic's deep love of Christ and of neighbor in Christ ignited this spark to a new level. Love and truth were two driving and inseparable forces in Dominic's life. In the same spirit, Dominic founded his Order and sent brothers out in pairs and small groups to university cities with a mission animated by love and truth, seeking truth in the Gospel and in dialogue with others about how best to live it faithfully.

Providence College stands in this same tradition at our present moment. Members of the Friar Family who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or in other ways are crying out for affirmation, inclusion, and protection in our community and in the Church. We say clearly: We see each one of you as a beloved child of God, a beloved member of the Friar Family. We know that you have often been made to feel invisible and marginalized, including in the name of Catholic teaching, and that is wrong. We pledge to do better.

Different times and places have seen diverse understandings of human sexuality and gender, and the changes in our own culture in the last seventy years have rightly been referred to as revolutionary. For decades now, Providence College, like many Catholic institutions, has failed to engage as creatively and as well as we might have the cultural changes in sexual mores. Particularly in the wake of the clergy sexual abuse crisis, many people of good will within and outside the Church have come to simply reject out of hand the Church's credibility to offer any teaching in this area of life.

In such times, silence on these matters often seems safest. Though some student groups, some divisions, and academic departments have dealt with some of these matters, for the most part, College leadership has not addressed them, except when they have bubbled over into controversies that had to be engaged. These have often centered around speakers or events related to LGBTQ issues. This has caused undue stress and negative attention on LGBTQ-identifying members of our community in ways we regret. This same silence has meant that those who have sought to proclaim Catholic teaching on human sexuality have also been marginalized or accused of hate speech. This is also deeply regrettable. A key hope of this document is that we can set out some key principles which can frame charitable discussion of these sensitive and important issues.

In conversations with many members of the Friar Family, we believe it is crucial to develop a pastoral approach for better inclusion and support of members of our community who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or in other ways. A necessary first step, however, is an articulation of the Church's vision of the human person and human sexuality that applies to all persons, and secondarily how that teaching shapes the Church's understanding of true inclusion.



OUR DOMINICAN CONTEXT

Providence College is not simply a Catholic college, but one founded and shaped by the Dominican Friars. As a Dominican college, we are called to explore the truth through all the academic disciplines at our disposal, including engagement with the truth as received in sacred Scripture and taught in the Catholic tradition, by use of both reason and faith. Our mission is our motto: *veritas*. We seek to pursue and to propose truth in our 21st century world, confident that we will encounter it here at PC: the truth of the world, the truth of ourselves, and the truth about God in Jesus Christ, who is Truth Incarnate.

Our Dominican mission demands still more. Dominic asked his followers to live lives marked by holiness and love of neighbor, in order to witness the love of Christ to all whom they encountered. When the great Dominican saint and scholar St. Thomas Aquinas wrote about the Christian life, he noted that *caritas*, usually translated as love or as charity, is so central to the Christian life of holiness and virtue that it should motivate our every action, shape our character and our very selves, and direct our lives to the love of God and neighbor and all things in their proper order and relation. *Caritas* is first and foremost the love we have for God, but it should shape and animate our love for truth, our love for neighbor, our promotion of the common good, and our pursuit of our own passions. And so, together with *veritas*, we propose that the Providence College community should be one marked by *caritas*. Commitment to *veritas* and *caritas* marked the life of Dominic and continues to shape the Order of Preachers. Standing in that tradition, Providence College aims to be a Beloved Community, one deeply formed by a collective commitment to both *veritas* and *caritas*, to the pursuit of truth and the embodiment of well-ordered love.

Our unique Catholic and Dominican identity demands that Providence College be a place that welcomes and embraces everyone with the deep respect and reverence demanded by *caritas*. At the same time, our understanding of both *caritas* and *veritas* is inextricably rooted in the message and person of Jesus Christ, so it is crucial, too, that we offer each person an encounter with Christ, the Gospel, and a vision of the world understood in light of the Gospel. This includes an understanding of the human person and the role and purpose of sexual identity, sexual orientation, as well as the role of personal sexual decisions. Our institutional commitments and policies are rooted in this vision, formed from centuries of Catholic tradition, and still taught authoritatively by the Church. We know that many members of our community are unfamiliar with these teachings, or familiar with them only as a caricature to be quickly dismissed. Thus, we invite all members of our community to consider this perspective in *caritas* and try to understand it and its importance for Providence College.



It is important to underscore that this teaching is for all members of the Friar Family. Though aspects of this teaching apply quite specifically to members of our community who identify as LGBTQ, the call to discipleship and holiness is a universal call and invites everyone to the kind of self-possession that allows for healthy, well-ordered relationships. Though we know not all will find this vision compelling or aspire to it, we hope that this presentation of Church teaching aids the Friar Family in understanding the vision that we hope informs all our institutional policies.

What follows is a presentation of some key ideas that animate Catholic teaching around the human person and human sexuality, offered for the consideration of all. The first section attends to the nature of the human person, especially as an integrated unity of body and soul. The second section focuses on Church teaching on human sexuality and the importance of the virtue of chastity for living lives of just and well-ordered love. The third section engages questions around biological sex and gender identity. We understand that these touch on very private and personal matters, around which there is much disagreement. We offer these teachings, drawn from official Catholic teaching and composed in a Dominican key, for the consideration of all, with humility, in hopes that they will be able to inform discussions going forward.

In this moment, we look to St. Dominic and trust in his bold vision, witness, and continuing prayers. In his lifetime, as both the Church and the world were undergoing dramatic changes and facing new ideas and new realities, Dominic continued to unite his love of Christ, his pursuit of truth, and his love of his neighbor, especially the neighbor in need. He continued to work in partnership with Church authorities, even as he created a new model for religious life to meet the needs of the Christian community and the world. We trust, too, that Providence College, inheritors of his tradition and led by his own brothers, can find a way to be faithful to his legacy. We can find a way to hold one another in the deep love and respect named by *caritas* even as we disagree and argue together in the pursuit of the fullness of truth suggested by *veritas*. In this moment, too, we look to Christ, who is both Love and Truth Incarnate. We trust that if we lean into both love and truth, we will find a harmony and a communion that is deeper than any conflicts among us.

PART I: THE HUMAN PERSON, A UNITY OF BODY AND SOUL

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The Church understands the human person to be created in the image and likeness of God. This gives each person a dignity and a sacredness that is irrevocable, inviolable, and in no way conditional on any identity, status, action, or choice. Although one might not live in accord with one's dignity or might fail to treat others with the dignity they deserve, such failures do not surrender or lessen the dignity of the person.

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Catholic teaching sees the human person as created, having been given a nature and a destiny by the divine Creator, who has formed us for union with God and with one another. When God creates human beings, male and female, in God's own image, God creates sexually differentiated human persons as part of the created order. Our created, given, sexed bodies are integral parts of our identity and connect us to the created world and other living beings. Such a point is crucial for the Catholic tradition and is expressive of what Pope Francis calls a Catholic "integral ecology." Accepting our own bodies as gift, according to the Pope, "is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home" (LS #155).

In the Incarnation, Christ truly took on human nature, including a male human body. In the creed, Christians affirm belief in the resurrection of our bodies. The importance of bodies is continually expressed in the sacramental life of the church. Physical signs like water, oil, bread and wine, express and contain spiritual realities that nourish and cleanse us, body and soul, as the whole persons we are. So, too, our bodies express and contain our whole selves, not just the physical, but the spiritual as well. The human body is a sacrament of the whole person, which Pope St. John Paul II says means that the body "has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it" (TOB 203). Our bodies are the visible signs of the invisible, transcendent persons we are.

Likewise, in moral theology, the integrity of the person is crucial. The intellect and the will, powers of the soul, direct the action of the body as we act and interact in the world, even as the bodily senses perceive the world around us and inform our understanding. When we act in freedom, we act as whole persons, doing good or harm to ourselves and our neighbors by our choices. The more we act for the good, the more we grow in the virtues crucial to the Christian life and human flourishing. The more we fail to act for the good, the more we develop vices which hinder our efforts to know and do the good. Caritas, the love of friendship with God and the love of neighbor for God's sake, is considered the chief virtue and the form of all virtues. Every virtue we develop, we develop most fully when we develop it as ordered to and by the caritas that is foundational to the Christian moral life. Caritas names the love of God that we are called to and made for, but it also refers to the love of persons we are called to by Christ — love of neighbors, of strangers, even of enemies. Caritas names a deep respect for persons and a desire for their good and their flourishing. It names what we mean by love but also what we mean by charity. It likewise informs the virtue of justice and orders the whole of our social life, including proper understanding of fairness, rights, and duties (CCC #1889). The Church teaches that the experience of such deep and abiding love, poured out in Jesus, but also experienced in human relationships, is a crucial part of opening up our hearts to the love of God.

Though we are created in God's image and destined for union with God, the Christian tradition understands us to be fallen creatures as well. The book of Genesis tells the story of our first parents choosing to abuse their freedom by disobeying God's command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (cf. CCC #397 and Genesis 3). This free rejection of the limits placed upon them by their Creator resulted in a loss of the original integrity of creation, an event referred to in Catholic theology as "the fall." This shattered the soul's direction of bodily desires, introduced lust and domination into the union of the man and the woman, caused disharmony between human beings and the rest of creation, and added death and decay into human experience (CCC #400).

Following St. Paul, the Church affirms both the universality of sin and the universality of grace for the human family: "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men." (Romans 5:18; quoted in CCC #402). The Catholic tradition holds that human nature after the fall is best understood not as totally corrupted, but as wounded. Both the intellect and the will can and do go astray, and we all experience the inclination to sin and evil called concupiscence. St. Paul expressed this brokenness of the will when he said, "For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate" (Romans 7:15). After the fall, every human being experiences something of this division, this failure of order within the self, this inability to know and to do the good and virtuous thing as fully as we would hope. Acceptance of Christ and a life of Christian discipleship through baptism and the other sacraments erases original sin and turns us back to God, but our nature remains weakened and inclined toward sin, such that the life of discipleship remains a spiritual battle for all (CCC #405). Thus, all human beings experience the disordering of desire in any and all areas of our lives, including our sexual desires. Christians understand that, after the fall, desire itself cannot be a reliable guide to healthy, well-ordered loving unless it is healed by the grace of Christ.

The work of Christ in his earthly life is centrally a work of redemptive love, restoring all of humanity to friendship with God, revealing God's love and the path of human flourishing, and inviting us into that life of love and discipleship. The universality of this invitation is clearly witnessed to in Scripture: "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8) and Christ's claim that "It is not the will of your father that even one of these should perish" (2 Peter 3:9). As we all are impacted by the sin of our first parents, so too are we all invited to the restoration offered in Christ.

PART II: CALLED TO LIVES OF CARITAS, JUSTICE, & CHASTITY

Christ's earthly mission is a revelation of a God who is love and an invitation to every person to embrace a life marked by the deep love of God and love of neighbor named by caritas. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that, "love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being" (CCC #2392). Each person is made to love and be loved, and to form loving relationships in accord with virtue (CCC # 2348). The divine invitation into relationships characterized by equality, mutuality, and respect is at the same time a call to live according to the virtue of chastity. The Catechism presents chastity as a virtue that "blossoms in friendship" and leads friends to "spiritual communion" with one another and serves to ensure that such friendships serve the good of all (CCC #2347). Though chastity is sometimes seen as simple abstention from sexual intercourse, it is also "an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom" (CCC 2339). Governing the passions by reason and virtue is a necessary condition for human beings to become capable of genuinely free choice. Otherwise, the passions rule the will.

St. Dominic, called "the ivory of chastity," was known for his commitment to this virtue of well-ordered love, both in his own life and for the Order he founded. Commitment to this virtue is a crucial part of Dominican life because development of chastity offers more than suppression of fleshly desires, also making possible the proper ordering and integration of all human desires. Dominic knew that chastity freed his followers to put the call to preach the Gospel in service to God and neighbor ahead of any worldly desire. Dominican spirituality continues to understand chastity as the virtue that allows us to love to our fullest, through an integrated expression of our love and affection that is in keeping with the truth of our relational intimacy and the dignity and flourishing of ourselves and those we would love well.

The Catholic tradition holds that God's creation of human beings with bodies sexed male and female, with the potential to join together in conjugal love to generate new life, is a key part of God's design for the nature of the human person and of the purpose of human sexuality. The tradition sees the sexual act, in which a married man and woman give themselves to one another wholly and totally, including their openness to procreation, as an act not only of bodies but of whole persons, including both bodies and souls (CCC #2361). Because the Church sees the conjugal act as ordered both to the procreation of children and to the total commitment of a marriage that is prepared to welcome and nurture children, it has taught that "the deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose" (CCC #2352).

In the vision of the Church, it is only through the disciplined development of the theological virtue of caritas, the cardinal virtue of justice, and the moral virtue of chastity that persons and communities can live lives marked by the self-giving love to which the Gospel invites us. These are the building blocks of the Beloved Community we aim to be. It is the development of chastity in particular that makes possible the fidelity of spouses to their marital vows as well as the fidelity of vowed religious to their commitment to celibacy. In hopes that they will help us become a community better equipped to support the flourishing of all of us and each of us, Providence College invites all members of the community to reflect upon the importance of these virtues and seek to develop and live them.



We know that this understanding of the meaning and purpose of sex is at odds with the beliefs and practices of many in our culture. Often sexual experience and experimentation are portrayed as a crucial part of discovering one's desires, pleasures, and even one's identity. This is not in keeping with how Catholic teaching understands proper and integral human development, which focuses on mastering one's passions and desires and ordering them according to reason and virtue. Cultural messages of sexual liberation can be aligned with sexual license, and all too often serve the interests of the powerful and exploit the vulnerable. Easy access to pornography has given many a distorted understanding of sexual intimacy, and we are deeply concerned about the presence of an alcohol-fueled hook-up culture in our own and so many other college communities. We invite all members of the Friar Family to consider the (perhaps surprising) possibility that chastity can make us more free to love, giving us the self-mastery to resist behavior which would objectify ourselves or our partners, and preparing us to pursue our particular vocations to flourish and help others flourish.

We are aiming for the support, holistic development, and spiritual formation of all Providence College students, including those who identify as lesbian, gay, or otherwise non-heterosexual. We aim to do this in such a way that our institutional goals and objectives, as well as our programs and initiatives, are consonant with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. With the Catholic Church, Providence College defends the inviolable dignity of every human person as beloved of God. As a result, the College deplores any offenses against that fundamental human dignity and calls for all its members to show true compassion and goodwill toward one another. And finally, we call all students to cultivate chaste and loving friendships, particularly across lines of difference and division that threaten to undermine the Friar Family.

In keeping with Church teaching, Providence College can neither condone nor support sexual activity outside the marital relationship or any sexual activities that "close the sexual act to the gift of life" (CCC #2357). This is true for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation. Providence College also recognizes that for all its students, "Chastity has laws of growth which progress through stages marked by imperfection and too often by sin" (CCC #2343). In other words, sometimes we fail to live the ideal of chastity we are aiming for. Sometimes it is through such missteps that we are able to learn more fully what it means to live the virtue well. We acknowledge that all of us are imperfect and learning, and we stand in need of repentance, mercy, and forgiveness as we develop these virtues. It is only over time that any of us grow into mature persons characterized by stable dispositions to charity, justice, and chastity. Thus, without drawing back from inviting all to live the Catholic Christian ideals of virtue, Providence College commits itself to extending the tender mercy of God to all who are striving to live the call to chastity, even and especially in the moments when they fail to do so.



As we strive to live out the deep *caritas* that would mark us as a Beloved Community, Providence College affirms the Church’s position that persons who identify as gay or lesbian “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided” (CCC #2358). The Church has long held that the number of persons who experience same-sex attraction is significant, that such attraction can be deep-seated and prior to any choice, and in many cases constitutes a trial and a burden for those who experience it (CCC #2358). Though acting on these inclinations is forbidden by the Lord as revealed in Scripture, the natural law, and the teaching of the Church’s Magisterium, it is also the case that Christians are called to treat homosexual persons with compassion. While the moral prohibition of these acts is clear, so too is the moral obligation of compassion, respect, and sensitivity towards anyone inclined to them. We unequivocally value the contributions that all members of the Friar Family make to our community on campus and beyond.

In keeping with the Catholic understanding of the inherently social nature of the person, Providence College remains committed to protecting and promoting the rights, responsibilities, and flourishing of all the members of our community, without exception.

It is particularly crucial for us as a Catholic and Dominican community that all our members understand that the Lord’s teaching entrusted to the Church in no way justifies or supports any form of shaming or condemnation on the basis of sexual orientation. It may seem strange, but the Church holds together both the sinfulness of non-marital sexual acts and the dignity and beloved-ness of those who might choose them. For lesbian and gay Christians, as for all Christians, a failure to live chastely in no way impinges on the beloved-ness and dignity of the persons concerned. The call to chastity presents a challenge for most Christians, particularly when we first try to answer that call. It is crucial that we cultivate a campus culture where every person is valued and respected as they are. Although the Lord’s teaching can and must be shared as a continual invitation to all who would embrace it, we must also welcome in real *caritas* every member of our community, whether they live their lives according to Church teaching or not.

PART III: INCLUSION, GENDER, AND SEX

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First, we hope for a rigorous, compassionate, respectful, and dignifying discussion in our community. And second, we hope to cultivate an environment where each member of our community is valued, beloved, and welcomed at Providence College.
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We also wish to speak to questions of gender identity in the context of our community's unqualified welcome of all persons. In our cultural moment, such concerns are also tied to the category of biological sex, so we wish to speak to that here as well.

A word of introduction: We proceed with humility. The discussion on our campus and in our society about the realities of sex and gender and their relation is not only conflictual and tender for many parties, but also incredibly diverse. Each person's experience of these questions is unique and deserves to be heard in compassion. We acknowledge that there are persons on our campus who identify as transgender, nonbinary, gender fluid, as well as in other ways. We respect and value each and every one of these persons. We value their contributions to our campus and believe that their willingness to share their experiences and their reflections upon them can enrich our pursuit of truth on these matters.

At the same time, if we are to converse well as a community, we need to acknowledge not only diverse experiences with regard to sex and gender, but also divergent uses of the same or similar terms and competing philosophical frameworks. There are multiple and contradictory ideas of how sex and gender do and should function, as well as radically different understandings of what is at stake in these conversations. Therefore, we will not be looking to speak to every representative concept and philosophy that we have found on our campus and in our society. Rather, we wish to speak to some of their philosophical and theological underpinnings so as to ground and orient our campus conversation. In this regard, we have two hopes. First, we hope for a rigorous, compassionate, respectful, and dignifying discussion in our community. And second, we hope to cultivate an environment where each member of our community is valued, beloved, and welcomed at Providence College.



In conversations about sex and gender identity, different people bring a wide variety of concepts and meanings to the table. Some are focused on an innate sense of one's own identity, with no necessary connection to biological sex. Others are more focused on the right to free expression of gender regardless of culturally constructed gender expectations. Still others are focused on the stability (or not) and normative value (or not) of the biological categories of male and female. Unless we are careful in tracking the divergent uses of similar language, we risk talking past one another. It is crucial to avoid this, both so that we converse well together here and now and so that we can faithfully engage the Catholic tradition, which understands human nature as a reality that remains constant enough that it can sensibly be spoken of and understood across time and culture.

As noted above, Catholic discussions of these matters must be based upon the idea that God created human persons in his image and likeness. The scriptural witness reveals that being created in God's image and likeness means human beings weren't created for a solitary existence. Rather, we were created for union with both God and the rest of the human family, as we were created in the image of a trinitarian God. We believe that the revelation of God as persons-in-communion also shows us something about who human persons are as created beings. Revelation shows God to be a communion of love as Trinity. Such love is kenotic, or self-emptying (Philippians 2:1-11), merciful (Luke 15: 11-32), and self-giving (John 15: 13). The Christian tradition has long held an equality of dignity between the persons in God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Though the persons are equal in dignity and share the singular divine nature, each person is distinct, and the distinctions matter. And yet God is still one. Such has profound implications for a Christian conception of the human person, for this trinitarian truth is reflected in creation, in which God made a world with genuine natural diversity, and this truth ought to shape all Christian visions of community.

Just as the distinctions among the persons of the Trinity do not undermine God's unity but make it possible, so too the differences between male and female make possible a profound unity capable of co-creating new life with God. Genesis tells us that the human person was created in the Divine Image as male and female (Gen 1:27). Though some would suggest that maleness and femaleness are mere biological facts with no necessary connection to gender or other identity, the Catholic tradition understands this differently. Our sexed bodies are part of God's providential plan calling us to love and be loved, to participate in the life of the Trinity, and of one another. Pope Francis has insisted that "biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated" (*Amoris Laetitia* #56). Though official Church teaching has not treated gender theory expansively, this intrinsic connection between gender identity and sexed body is consistently upheld. In addition, Church teaching stresses the importance of accepting one's sexual identity and the importance of the "physical, moral, and spiritual differences and complementarities" for the flourishing of persons, couples, and communities (CSDC #224). This perspective acknowledges cultural understandings, and expressions concerning gender can and do vary greatly, but it also maintains that gender is rooted in the natural reality of sexed difference as male and female. Separating gender from sexual identity is harmful to personal integration and one's acceptance of one's body.



This teaching assumes another foundational principle for Providence College: The distinction between human nature, which is constant and universal, and culture, the variety of ways in which particular persons have shaped and cultivated ourselves and our communities in their freedom, is fundamental to our knowledge of the human person. They can be distinguished, but they cannot be separated from one another. The Church teaches that the human person has been created by God with a particular nature that includes real and significant freedom. We cannot change or redefine our nature, but within the limits of it we are free both individually and communally, not only to make our own choices and give real shape to our own lives, but also to shape our communities and cultures together in that same freedom.

In contrast, some trends in contemporary thought on sex and gender identity presume an understanding of the human person as merely socially (or culturally) constructed, eclipsing any enduring sense of human nature. Some might acknowledge the possibility of such a human nature but reject the idea that we could know it with any certainty. In these discussions, gender is often unmoored from any robust or stable concept of human nature, especially a nature that includes sexed bodies, and is reduced only to social construction and caricature. Such accounts sometimes extend even to a conviction of the social construction of the category of sex itself, as seen in the use of the phrase “sex assigned at birth.” There are in fact a number of biological conditions collected under the umbrella term “intersex,” and a small number of these result in sexual ambiguity at birth. Nonetheless, for the vast majority of people, sex is observed from innate characteristics rather than arbitrarily assigned at birth, and an intrinsic connection between sexed bodies and personal identity remains. The existence of intersex persons does not deny the reality of sexed bodies as part of the natural order, nor does it mean that sex itself is wholly constructed.

A Catholic theological approach resists such a totalizing social constructionist path. Though the Church certainly acknowledges the social nature of the human person and the deep ways that language, culture, and personal virtues and vices shape us, we still believe that human nature is in large part a given, created reality. The Second Vatican Council affirmed the intimate connection between human nature and human culture, stating that we come “to a true and full humanity only through culture” (GS #53). Church teaching sees culture as the collective work of peoples developing and perfecting in freedom the bodily and spiritual qualities inherent in human beings. While the Church acknowledges and embraces diverse cultural expressions and customs and affirms their importance for full human development, the tradition sees these as particular developments upon what is enduring and universal in human nature.

Unlike social constructionist approaches, the Catholic account understands there to be a nature to God and to the human person; that these natures can be known at least partially; and that they can be spoken of truthfully in human languages across time and culture. Put simply: We hold the conviction that we can both know and speak truthfully about God and about human persons. We are aware that this conviction is counter-cultural in the present moment. Many believe that there are no objectively knowable truths about these things, convinced that they are merely subjective, all relative, or culturally constructed through and through.



At Providence College, we hope to build a campus culture that embodies the dignity of the human person as fully as possible, and seek to create policies, procedures, and structures that make it easier for us to live as the Beloved Community this vision calls us to be. Although such principles can and should be appropriate and intelligible within our culture, all our institutional practices, including those that draw us toward deeper equity and inclusion, must follow from the Catholic understanding of the human person.

We also want to take this moment to acknowledge that many in our community will disagree with this account of the human person. We want to say explicitly that we value your perspective and are hopeful to be in relationship and conversation with you. Different perspectives on the possibility of knowing truth matter at Providence College because we are a community dedicated to the pursuit of veritas. Part of human nature, by God's design, is that we have an intellect oriented toward the pursuit of truth. We are reasoning, rational creatures by nature. And the same God who created us as rational has also revealed certain truths to us centrally in Christ himself and through Scripture and the tradition of the Church. The reception of the truth of such a revelation is an act of faith that we believe is guided by the Holy Spirit. Although some truths of faith are beyond what we could discover on our own through reason, we believe that they are not contrary to reason but are in fact compatible with and complementary to it. This is why we talk about faith and reason as two crucial tools in our quest for veritas. We need faith to enrich, strengthen, and guide our use of reason. But we also need the tools of reason to understand faith and its implications for our understanding about God, ourselves, and our world. Using reason and faith together allows us to grasp and communicate the truth more profoundly

CONCLUSION

As we look to more practical considerations, all the policies and structures to be enacted in light of this document will be founded on and framed by these theological foundations. Any discourse that construes these foundations as marginal or optional, rather than crucial and constitutive of our institutional approach to these matters, will inhibit our ability to continue to live faithfully the Catholic and Dominican commitments that have shaped Providence College since its founding. Though the habits of conversation in our religiously neutral public square sometimes lead us to expect that religious convictions will be privately held, we are not a public institution, but a Catholic and a Dominican one. We know that many members of our community are more comfortable in discussions that speak as though we can or should be neutral, agnostic, or private about truth claims, especially those related to God, human nature, or morality. However, such supposedly neutral discourse actually de-centers those who operate out of Catholic convictions. Our vision for Providence College is grounded in the Church's understanding of the human person and truth, which the above foundations elaborate in summary form. These theological foundations are the seedbed from which all our institutional efforts must grow.

Ex Corde Ecclesiae makes it clear that Catholic universities are to form “an authentic human community animated by the spirit of Christ” (#25). A Catholic university community is to find its unity in “a common dedication to the truth, a common vision of the dignity of the human person, and, ultimately, the person and message of Christ” (Ex Corde Ecclesiae #21). Therefore, these understandings of the human person and the role and purpose of sexual identities and sexual activity in our lives have to shape our institutional policies and programs on these matters and do so in a way that is consistent with the teaching authority of the Church and our Dominican tradition. Again, we call on the witness and guidance of Dominic, whose commitment to *caritas* and *veritas* was united, intertwined, and inspirational.

We know that not everyone will embrace these theological presuppositions of our task as a Catholic and Dominican institution of higher learning. We expect vigorous discussion on all these subjects. Indeed, we hope for it. Through such disputation we believe we will come into a more profound understanding of *veritas* and how to live it well together in *caritas*, here in our own time and place. In fact, part of the service that Ex Corde Ecclesiae asks of every Catholic university is that it enriches both the Church and the society in which it finds itself by helping to renew the expression of the timeless truths of the Gospel so that they are accessible and intelligible in the particular location and cultural moment in which the university finds itself. Done well, this should help the Church better respond to the needs of each time and place and should help each culture to progress in ways that truly serve human flourishing (Ex Corde Ecclesiae #31-32).

Essential to our Catholic and Dominican identity is the maintenance of the capacity for our faculty to teach and our students to engage Catholic tradition in a way that is intelligible. Our institution must maintain policies, procedures, and structures that are framed by this Catholic vision. Although every individual on campus need not personally agree with this vision or live according to it, we are hopeful that many will be interested in engaging this vision and contributing to conversations about the pivotal elements necessary to maintain our institutional commitment to this vision in a way that will protect and promote the flourishing of all members of our Friar Family.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING:

- Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 2000.
- Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (CSDC), 2005.
- Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (AL), 2016.
- Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* (LS), 2015.
- Pope John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (ECE), 1990.
- Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (trans Waldstein, 2006).
- Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), 1965.

APPENDIX 1: ANCHOR POINTS FOR ONGOING CONVERSATION

We see the following as foundational theological concepts that root our institutional vision on these matters. They will therefore shape our conversations going forward. These anchors have deeply shaped the foregoing document.

(1) The dignity and sacredness of every human person, in a way that is irrevocable, inviolable, and in no way conditional on any identity, status, action, or choice.

(2) The understanding of the common good as the ordering of communities for the flourishing of all persons and of each person, where each person has both the right and the responsibility to work toward this flourishing and the conditions that will promote it. At the heart of this is the conviction that human persons, made in the image of a triune God, are always already persons-in-communion, so that the good of each is part of what constitutes the good of all, just as the good of all is a constitutive part of the good of each. Not a single one of us is flourishing in fullness unless we are all flourishing. And we each have a responsibility to participate in and promote the social structures and associations that will help each of us, especially the most vulnerable, reach their fullest flourishing.

(3) The importance of the Christian call to love all with the deep respect implied in *caritas*, especially the most vulnerable, and the understanding that members of our community who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or otherwise queer are very often among the vulnerable, especially during their youth and young adult years, and even more so when they are also a part of another historically marginalized community.

(4) The value and importance of Catholic teaching on marriage, sex, and family, including the idea that marriage, as it is intrinsically ordered to the procreation of children, is created by God as a natural institution founded on the union of one man and one woman. Any sexual activity outside of the context of marriage thus understood is contrary to the moral law and a life of both human flourishing and Christian disciples.

APPENDIX 2: A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF LANGUAGE AND TRUTH

The Catholic tradition has always depended on the conviction that we can truthfully speak about the nature of God and the human person in the midst of radical plurality. As noted above, we are a community with diverse voices, multiple languages, and a range of understandings and usages of the concepts that are crucial to this conversation. It may seem counter-cultural to suggest that one can make truthful and meaningful statements about these things in the midst of such diversity, so we want to offer a humble theological account of this possibility.

There are profound theological reasons to acknowledge the limitations of human language in expressing truth, especially transcendent truths, such as those about God and the human person. They stand at the horizon of what is knowable by human reason. Human languages are culturally constructed; they are organic and evolving. Learning to speak our native language teaches us not only how to describe our world but also how to interpret it. Our knowledge of the world is always mediated by language because language is the vehicle of thought. Language, however, is irreducibly practical and particular. Specific languages develop in their particular times and places, their own cultural contexts. How could truth exist that is beyond the particularities of these cultural contexts?

This question has been near the heart of the Christian tradition since its founding. In the beginning of the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ is revealed as the logos of God. Often translated as ‘word,’ its meaning is even more expansive. Logos is the etymological root of the word ‘logic’ and carries a sense of the ordering of the whole world. Its sense is both word and speech, but also the logic or grammar, the structure of meaning that holds the whole together. It speaks to the world’s intrinsic intelligibility. Christians believe that the Logos of God became human in Jesus Christ, at a particular time and place and culture. Through the particular life of Jesus Christ, the words he spoke, the teachings he gave, and all that he did, we have before us the revelation of God and God’s plan for the cosmos, of the logos of God. In the particularity of Jesus, culturally contextualized as any of us are, we have the eternal, unchanging God revealing himself truthfully, and doing so in a manner that still holds and is meaningful to our own particularity. And so, we believe, human language and culture can mediate and express truth, even truth that transcends the particularity of any given time, place, or culture. But it is and always will be a truth that we approach humbly, with no pretense of ownership or control. We are made to seek truth and to know it, and to express it in our language and participate in it as we live our lives.



What is the purpose of these statements?

These statements provide our institution a common language and foundation in the Catholic Church's approach to sexuality and gender, as well as our approach to pressing questions that arise as we build a Beloved Community. These statements will help inform policies, practices, and decision-making. Importantly, this vision is not shared to make judgments on one's personal life. Rather, as they state, "as we look to more practical considerations, all the policies and structures to be enacted in light of this document will be founded on and framed by these theological foundations." Our hope is that this vision will bring clarity, trainings and resources, policy review, and faculty and staff engagement.

How were they created and what are the sources?

These statements are designed to present Catholic teaching on the human person and human sexuality. Organized by the executive office with the support of many hands from our PC Community, they seek to make accessible Catholic teaching on these important questions. If one is interested in primary texts and more Church teaching, a good place to start would be the references and further reading section given at the end of the theological foundations document. The statements refer to this saying, "We offer these teachings, drawn from official Catholic teaching and composed in a Dominican key, for the consideration of all, with humility, in hopes that they will be able to inform discussion going forward."

Who are these documents for?

These documents are for our entire community. We recognize that not all in our community share or are familiar with these core Catholic beliefs, so we've sought to present the basic principles of our College's mission with clarity in order to make these documents accessible to everyone. As a Catholic College we recognize that the pursuit of truth comes with the need for the light of faith. We affirm our commitment to encourage people of all faiths to join us in this pursuit of truth. As is said in the statements, "We know that many members of our community are unfamiliar with these teachings, or familiar with them only as a caricature to be quickly dismissed. Thus, we invite all members of our community to consider this perspective in caritas (love) and try to understand it and its importance for Providence College." Additionally, "...we know not all will find this vision compelling or aspire to it, we hope that this presentation of Church teaching aids the Friar Family in understanding the vision that we hope informs all our institutional policies." One might find it helpful when one is not Catholic or disagrees with Church teaching to go back to this purpose of this vision.



How do they welcome the community?

Providence College welcomes all people. We are committed that even in differences of opinion and beliefs, all people will be gladly received, provided support throughout their time here, and seen as a valuable member of our community. As is said in the statement, "In keeping with the Catholic understanding of the inherently social nature of the person, Providence College remains committed to protecting and promoting the rights, responsibilities, and flourishing of all the members of our community, without exception." We recognize that different views on sex, gender, and chastity can be perceived and felt as not welcoming, but we hope to reassure all that even in our differences we envision a college campus where people of all backgrounds, experiences, and identities will have their rights and dignity recognized and will be accompanied in their pursuit of academic excellence and truth.

What if I disagree with parts of these statements?

We recognize that people may disagree with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Much of Catholic teaching has become counter-cultural. We recognize that this statement, and thus the College's views on sex, responsibility, and freedom, will differ significantly from the views of members of our community. And as is shared, "We want to say explicitly that we value your perspective and are hopeful to be in relationship and conversation with you." At the same time, "We know that many members of our community are more comfortable in discussions that speak as though we can or should be neutral, agnostic, or private about truth claims, especially those related to God, human nature, or morality. However, such supposedly neutral discourse actually de-centers those who operate out of Catholic convictions. Our vision for Providence College is grounded in the Church's understanding of the human person and truth... These theological foundations are the seedbed from which all our institutional efforts must grow." We ask for rigorous conversation and respect for our distinctive Catholic approach among our community members.

Who can I speak to for more information?

As it relates to understanding the statement, the Office of Mission and Ministry is available to speak to any community member, to hear concerns, and to help answer any questions that may arise: <https://catholic-dominican.providence.edu/mission-ministry/>



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