



Where Justice and Truth Meet

April 2023

We...reject the societal barriers created by the misuse of power."

— A Prayer for the Life of the World



TRANSGENDER PERSONS, THEIR FAMILIES AND THE CHURCH

This edition of WJTM brings the second story from CHA (Catholic Health Association of the United States) booklet: *Transgender Persons, Their Families and the Church*.

We continue our journey of learning from the stories of others, allowing the Holy Spirit to assist us to come to new understandings and perspectives.

In this second edition we meet Maureen Cauffey, a transgender woman and business owner.

It Is Mercy I Desire, Not Sacrifice... BY MAUREEN CAUFFEY

Good morning. My name is Maureen. I am a transgender woman and a Catholic. I live in Maryland just north of Washington, D.C. I have been married for twenty-five years and serve as president and partner in a successful business. Originally from Colorado, I am one of six siblings. I hold a bachelor's degree in journalism and business administration from Regis University in Denver. I am grateful for the opportunity to share a little of my story with you today. I ask for your compassion and understanding. As Jesus taught us, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."
Matthew 9-13.

To be clear, until recently I have chosen to keep my transgender identity hidden for the

sake of faith and my family. This secret has tormented my inner thoughts, allowed fear to flourish, and has caused serious physical illness. In truth, my body can no longer endure this level of hidden anxiety. *God knows who I am and loves me unconditionally.*

I believe that it is important that I express the depth of my faith. You see, God is the essence of my life. Think of a car without gas, a human body without oxygen. As Saint Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

As a practicing Catholic, I frequently receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and attend Mass daily. I greet the dawn of every morning in quiet prayer seeking direction from the Holy Spirit on how best to serve God. I recite the rosary daily, praying for the intercession of our Blessed Mother.

Through much sacrifice, my parents provided me with an excellent Catholic education. I attended grade school with the Dominican Sisters. In high school and college, I was educated by Jesuits.

My transgender story is not unique in that I identified as a girl at an early age, but never spoke about it. As an adult, I continued to suppress my transgender truth and offer this suffering in silence to God. Perhaps this was my cross to bear? I thought it would be better to endure this anguish than cause pain to those people the Lord has placed in my life.

— YOUR —
Story
MATTERS

After all, Jesus showed us the ultimate gift of sacrifice by offering his life for our sins.

However, hiding my true self was too much for my body to bear. Five years ago, I started experiencing unbearable chest pain on the left side of my body. The pain was so severe that I could not sleep. Lying awake, night after night, month after month, I wondered if I would ever go to sleep again. My doctor set up appointments with multiple specialists to determine the cause. Some of the many visits included:

- ◆ Consultations with a gastroenterologist who prescribed powerful drugs to combat the problem, but provided no relief.
- ◆ An echocardiogram was ordered, but there were no heart problems.
- ◆ Next, MRI and CT exams revealed a possible lesion on the left kidney. The final diagnosis was that there was no cancer.
- ◆ The MRI also suggested cysts on my lungs, leading me to a pulmonary specialist. The conclusion was that there were no lung issues.
- ◆ Then, I was sent to a GERD surgeon specialist. He believed that a procedure to repair the sphincter in my chest would relieve the pain. Surgery was scheduled but required an endoscopy prior to the procedure. The endoscopy revealed no damage to the sphincter, thus no surgery.
- ◆ Finally, I was again sent back to the gastroenterologist, who suggested I take a new drug with an identified side effect of dementia.

At this point, I started wondering if the stress of hiding my authentic self was

causing the excruciating pain. I was terrified to eat anything. Sleep was more important than food. I lost 30 pounds in a short period of time. I had planned to take my transgender identity to the grave, and it was becoming a real possibility. But very significantly, when I had time to be Maureen, all my symptoms disappeared.

I came to the realization that I could no longer continue to suppress my true self. I met with Dr. Lin Fraser, a therapist who specializes in issues of gender identity. She had a very conservative approach to treating transgender people, and I knew she was a Christian. We agreed to start

regular therapy sessions. After a couple of months working with her, I was no longer afraid to go to sleep at night. I slept in my own bed for the first time in almost two years.

However, the symptoms persisted. Lin told me that my transgender condition was progressive, and suggested I consider pursuing hormone therapy. Our discussions centered on the reality that I would have to transition to enjoy any quality of life. Therapy was helping but not solving my health issues.

My thoughts remained focused on not wanting to offend God or hurt my loved ones. However, it became increasingly difficult to function.

I decided to seek spiritual guidance.

On two separate occasions, I met with priests for spiritual direction. In my first meeting, the priest said two immensely powerful things to me. First, he asked if I was (as Maureen) “comfortable in my own skin,” to which I responded, “yes.” Secondly, he said, “God doesn’t make mistakes.” He explained that I should not

Sharing one's story

is heart



work

be embarrassed or fearful of being transgender. God made me this way for a reason.

Unfortunately, my second meeting with another priest was deeply troubling. I shared most of the story that I am presenting to you here today. After listening to me, he told me that my transgender journey was my cross to bear and that I could not move forward with transition. He said that if I transitioned, I would be “throwing away my cross.”

Thank God I found Sister Luisa. I had searched the internet on numerous occasions seeking transgender Catholic resources. It was imperative for me to remain within the framework of the Church. Finally, I found an article on Sister Luisa’s ministry. I recall an early conversation with her when she stated, “Holiness is being true to who we know ourselves to be. To live in truth is God’s will for us. The ‘self’ that needs to die is the false self, never the true self. God desires that you be your true self.”

Spiritually, I have found peace in claiming my authentic identity as transgender and Catholic. Physically, I am much better but still endure periodic episodes of pain. From this day forward, I will no longer hide from

being Maureen. Soon, my wife, family, and friends will know the real me. Transition is imminent. Anything short of this revelation would be disingenuous to God and my family. (My Jesus I trust in you!)

I ask you to pray for all transgender people seeking truth within the Church. In a special way, I request your prayers for a friend who

has abandoned the Church because she was told she would never be accepted as her true transgender self. A lifelong Catholic, she has abandoned all aspects of her Christian faith.

Stories

*help us
understand...*

In closing, the grace of a strong faith has been instrumental for me in maintaining a hard-earned balance between living in compliance with my gender assigned at birth and acknowledging my authentic self before God.

Jesus’ life on earth centered on caring for the poor and marginalized. No one was then, nor is now, outside his compassion. As Jesus said, “It is mercy I desire, not sacrifice.”

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On March 20, 2024 eight members of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Doctrinal Committee, led by Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, signed a 14 page statement entitled “**Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body.**” The statement’s intent was to provide moral criteria to Catholic health care institutions for discerning medical interventions for transgender persons.

While the document has support from some in our church, for others with a closer connection to transgender persons, it raises concerns.

Sr. Luisa Derouen, a Dominican Sister of Peace who has ministered among the transgender community since the 1990s and was featured first in the CHA booklet *Transgender Persons, Their Families and the Church*, said the document is "not just about health care." In her view, "The reality is that a statement like this from bishops can have negative and serious ramifications for transgender people and their families in every arena of their lives."

For more analysis and comments on this statement: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/critics-say-us-bishops-new-statement-transgender-health-care-lacks-sound-science-and-trans>

[Fr. Dan Horan: U.S. Bishops' New Transgender Document Is "Nothing Short of a Disaster" - New Ways Ministry](#)

Seeing with the lens of Intersectionality!

1. Earth Month: [Taking PRIDE in LGBTQ+ History and Access to Nature](#)
2. Indigenous LGBTQ+ People: Disparities and Data Justice 2022 [Native American LGBTQ+ Panel](#)

Other Newsworthy Items

- We hope that the [JPIC April Dialogue](#) that sisters and associates received at the end of March provided stimulating conversation and new awareness of the history and cultures of native peoples before Europeans arrive.
- On March 30, 2023, the Vatican released a [statement](#) repudiating the long held, church-endorsed concepts that "fail[ed] to recognize the inherent human rights of indigenous peoples, including what has become known as the legal and political 'doctrine of discovery.'"
- A few years ago, the JPIC Committee prepared a fact sheet on the [Doctrine of Discovery](#) that you might find helpful.
- Sr. Beth Murphy’s article in the Sunday Springfield State Journal Register newspaper, [What's at the crux of the Doctrine of Discovery](#) speaks to it as well.
- Illinois lawmakers are advancing a [measure](#) that would require public elementary and high schools to include a unit of Native American history in their social studies curriculum, beginning with the 2024-2025 school year.