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Op-Ed for Immediate Release
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Respect for human dignity

On February 14, the *Casper Star Tribune* published an article titled “307 Politics: Two traditionally conservative institutions, two different attitudes on LGBTQ rights.” To begin, it is important to note that the Catholic Church is neither conservative nor liberal, and it does not endorse either political party. The Catholic Church does speak to issues that impact our human family. One such issue is the dignity of all human persons.

The article to which I refer conflated legal concerns about same-sex marriage with the Catholic Church’s support for the dignity of LGBTQ people. These are separate issues. The first regards the institution of marriage as it is defined legally or by religious institutions. The second concerns a national statement that I signed, which states that LGBTQ youth are to be treated with “respect, compassion and sensitivity.” This statement is taken from Catechism of the Catholic Church (#2358), which has been in place for nearly 30 years. To suggest that statement reflects a change in the Church’s teaching is not accurate. The inherent dignity of each human person has been a consistent aspect of the Church’s moral teaching.

Unfortunately, the dignity of LGBTQ people continues to be attacked, so there is a need to affirm publicly that they are to be treated with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Studies of youth in grades 7-12 found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth were more than twice as likely to have attempted suicide as their heterosexual peers. Therefore, I re-affirm my support of the dignity of LGBTQ people who are to be treated with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. They are beloved children of God and our brothers and sisters in the human family.

Nevertheless, we need to distinguish between the dignity of LGBTQ people and promoting same-sex marriage. Pope Francis said, “It is an incongruity to speak of homosexual marriage.” Previously, he warned against threats to the institution of “marriage,” which he explicitly described as “between a man and a woman.” For him, a heterosexual union is unique because it implies the difference between the man and the woman who unite in reciprocity and are capable of engendering life. The word “marriage” only applies to that reality.

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Unfortunately, many people are unable to understand that when we respect the human dignity of all persons, it does not mean that we simultaneously affirm their worldviews, opinions, or behavior. It is equally unfortunate that any expression of support for the respect, compassion, and sensitivity toward at-risk youth is interpreted as affirming current ideologies, including “gender theory.”

While there are many essential aspects surrounding LGBTQ issues to address in society, we must speak about these issues with courage, listen with compassion, and respond with respect—like we would dialogue with members of our own family.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Steven Biegler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Bishop Steven Biegler
Catholic Diocese of Cheyenne

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