

# QUESTIONS of GENDER & SEXUALITY

## “The Church & the Transgender Person”

James J. Martin SJ is an American Jesuit priest, writer, editor-at-large of *America* magazine and the founder of **Outreach** which is an LGBTQ Catholic resource. On the website **Outreach.faith** Martin published an in-depth, extensive article entitled “**The Church and the Transgender Person**” in 2022 – <https://outreach.faith/2022/05/the-church-and-the-transgender-person/> . The complete article covers the transgender situation in the United States, the approaches of some US dioceses, and the experience of transgender persons and those serving them in diverse professional relationships. **Here are some excerpts from Martin’s “urgent steps” toward a pastoral approach** as people continue to grow in understanding this complex and critically important facet of being human.

**WAIT.** There is an immediate need to set aside the current temptation to judge, declare and teach, when so little is still understood about the transgender identity, and, moreover, so many are at serious physical risk from persecution and harassment .... Thus, **waiting may be the most important thing that the church can do right now** .... The primary danger in rushing out condemnatory policies is that they will vilify a group of people precisely when they most need support .... A final danger is the alienation of youth—and not just transgender youth.

**LISTEN.** “Before they say another word about transgender people or gender identity, **the US bishops needs to show significant evidence that they have listened to a wide range of experiences** from persons for whom gender is a question,” (Francis De Bernardo, co-director of New Ways Ministry.) “They also need to show that they have read, studied and seriously considered the scientific and social scientific research that supports positions that challenge gender binary” ....

**DO NOT JUDGE.** With ongoing research, new discoveries and increasing numbers of personal testimonies about the transgender experience being shared—as well as the fact that transgender people are under attack—the last thing that bishops should do is issue policies that are condemnatory, restrictive or punitive. In other words, **the church should listen to Jesus who says, “Judge not”** — not telling transgender people that they are the result of sinful or selfish choices, abandoning God, destroying the family, annihilating the concept of nature, merely bowing to peer pressure or giving in to gender ideology.

**DO NOT BIND.** Setting binding policies now, especially restrictive and punitive ones, for an entire diocese, much less an entire country or an entire church, removes from the individuals involved in decisions about transgender people—bishops, pastors, pastoral associates, educators and parents—**the ability to use the latest scientific, medical and psychological data, which are updated almost weekly** ....

**ADVOCATE.** Transgender people are **among the most marginalized people in society and surely the most marginalized group in the church today**. As I’ve mentioned, they are at a severe risk of harassment and beating, as well as suicide and self-harm. In much of Western society, there are moves towards welcoming gays and lesbians, but in most places the door is shut for transgender people. As I see it, **most of the world treats transgender people today the same way that it treated gay people 50 years ago: with confusion, rejection and disgust** .... In his public ministry, Jesus continually stood with the most marginalized, the most vulnerable and the most rejected. And there are few groups more marginalized, vulnerable and rejected than the transgender community.

