

Haarlem, 9 October 2018

Most Holy Father,

The Working Group of Catholic Gay Pastors (WKHP) has been active in the Netherlands for thirty-eight years. It is an association of homosexual priests (both diocesan and regular), deacons and pastoral workers, committed to the well-being of gay people within the Church and broader society. The Working Group currently has 45 members. We also have close ties with our colleagues in Flanders, the 'Holebipastores'.

Our reason for writing to you is the document *Il dono della vocazione presbiterale*, which was published by the Congregation for the Clergy on 8 December 2016. It is a continuation of the policy adopted by your two predecessors to prevent gay men from being ordained as priests. Although the document states that the Church deeply respects the persons in question, it also makes the arbitrary and unfounded statement that: "Such persons, in fact, find themselves in a situation that gravely hinders them from relating appropriately to both men and women" (§199). In May of this year various news media reported that during a meeting at the Italian Bishops' Conference, you strongly supported the banning of homosexual candidates for the priesthood.

We now wish to inform you that, as members of the Working Group, we are deeply unhappy with this vision and this policy concerning homosexuality and the priesthood, for the following reasons:

1. At this point in time there are already countless priests working within our Church, who are in fact gay. These men function well, or less so or even badly, as is the case with heterosexual clergy. This has always been the case. *Il dono della vocazione presbiterale* completely ignores this reality.
2. In this document homosexual priests implicitly receive the message that (a) they are by definition unfit for their role because of their sexual orientation and (b) they should never have become a priest in the first place. This message can easily be understood by them as a disqualification, and can therefore be burdensome and demotivating with respect to their office as priests. That is certainly how we ourselves experienced the document.
3. We believe that suitability for priesthood does not depend on whether you are heterosexual or homosexual, but rather on whether you are able to deal well with your own sexuality as a seminarian or a priest.
4. Heterosexual and homosexual seminarians and priests who are aware of the nature of their sexuality, who accept it as given by God, who are not ashamed about it, who can (learn to) speak about it in an appropriate and meaningful way, and who (learn to) deal with it properly in their role as a priest (or seminarian), are not the problem in our opinion. On the contrary, they can and do function well and have a valuable role to play within our Faith and Church.
5. Seminarians and priests who deny, disown or suppress their sexuality to themselves and to others are more likely to manifest themselves as being a problem in the context of our Faith and Church. An array of imbalances, abuse and inappropriate conduct towards others and oneself can be the result. We query the psychological validity of the vision as expressed in DVP §200 ("Different, however, would be the case in which one were dealing with homosexual tendencies that were only the expression of a transitory

problem – for example, that of an adolescence not yet superseded. Nevertheless, such tendencies must be clearly overcome at least three years before ordination to the diaconate”). This may be wishful thinking, and could act as an invitation to suppressing this tendency, with all the possible negative consequences mentioned above. In this way the Church deludes both itself and homosexual candidates for the priesthood.

6. We have the distinct impression that the Vatican and the Congregation for the Clergy and perhaps even you yourself, tend to suggest that those priests who are openly gay are the ones responsible for the sexual abuse of children and minors. We disagree with this. We believe that the current major crisis with respect to this context is primarily the result of the disapproval, suppression, denial and the poor integration of sexuality, and especially homosexuality, on the part of many individual priests and within our Church as a whole. One is simply unable or unwilling to discuss it, or banned from mentioning it, except within the sacrament of confession. In our view this is detrimental to the Church as a whole and to the (gay) priests themselves in particular.

It is our assessment that the manner in which our Roman Catholic Church has dealt with homosexual people, has spoken and written about them to this very day is not something that has been received positively in the Netherlands. This is equally true for Non-Catholics as well as Catholics. The preaching of the gospel and its credibility is and will continue to be negatively affected with this attitude towards homosexuality.

Dear Pope Francis, we have great sympathy for you personally and we greatly respect the manner with which you exercise the duties of your office as pope. You have often shown consideration and appreciation of homosexual people. It is, however, the Church's policy and seemingly also your own approach concerning priesthood and homosexuality that contradict such consideration and understanding. For this reason we ask you to review and correct the stipulation in *Il dono della vocazione presbiterale* that by definition disqualifies homosexual candidates to the celibate priesthood.

We would appreciate being involved in further reflection on this matter. We therefore propose that we meet you or one of your representatives in the near future. We look forward to your response to this proposal.

With warm fraternal greetings,
on behalf of the Working Group of Catholic Gay Pastors
(Werkverband van Katholieke Homo-Pastores),

Drs. Frans Bossink, chair
The Netherlands
contact@homopastor.nl

Cc. (1) Mgr. Dr. Angelo Cavalli, Apostolic Nuncio in the Netherlands, (2) Congregation for the Clergy, attn Beniamino Cardinal Stella, prefect, (3) all Dutch and Flemish bishops and auxiliary bishops.