

ACCOMPANYING LGBT+ INDIVIDUALS

REAL SCENARIOS FOR CHURCH LEADERS

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Introduction

I think many Catholics today are looking for neat, tidy scripts for how to respond to LGBT+ people. How do I explain Church teaching? What do I say when someone comes out? Should I use someone's chosen name? Those questions matter. But taken alone, they risk missing something essential. At the center of every one of these situations is not an argument to win or a position to defend, but a person and a relationship. When we focus only on apologetics, we can lose sight of the human beings in front of us.

These scenarios are meant to slow us down. Each one is drawn from real stories shared with me over the years, with identifying details changed or removed. There is no answer key at the back. Instead, this is an invitation to wrestle honestly with situations many LGBT+ people navigate every single week.

The goal is not perfect phrasing. It is deeper charity, clearer integrity, and more faithful adherence to the Church's call to treat all people with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.

-Justin Telthorst
Founder of Empty Chairs

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1. A Party Invitation

You're hosting a small get-together with close college friends. One of them texts and says he'd love to come, and asks if he can bring his boyfriend. You genuinely didn't realize he was dating anyone. You pause. This group will be mostly friends from college who were all very involved in the Catholic student center. You feel a flicker of anxiety about how the night might go. What do you do?

2. The Couple at Mass

You're at Sunday Mass and notice two women sitting in the pew in front of you. You don't know them, though you think you've seen one of them at church before. They are dressed respectfully, attentive, and participating. Throughout the liturgy, you notice they sit very close and quietly hold hands. You find yourself distracted. You want to be faithful to Church teaching, but you're unsure what that faithfulness requires in this moment. What do you do?

3. The Friend Returning to Faith

Your friend, who has been in a same-sex relationship for several years, tells you he misses the Church. He grew up Catholic and wants to start going to Mass again. He knows the Church's teaching and also acknowledges that he doesn't intend to break up with his partner. You don't want to push him away, but also want to be honest with him. How do you respond?

4. Meeting A Stranger

You're at a friend's housewarming party. Someone new joins the group. Your friend says, "This is Alex, she just moved here." While you're talking to Alex, she shares that she is transgender and transitioned a few years ago. You feel unsure about what to say, but you also don't want to freeze or make it awkward. How do you respond?

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5. The Sister Coming Home

Your younger sister comes home for the holidays and tells you she's bringing her girlfriend to Christmas dinner. You've heard about this relationship from the beginning, and you can see that this is a serious relationship. Your sister states that she doesn't want drama, just to be included like everyone else's significant other. Your parents are uneasy and have already made a few tense comments. You love your sister. You love your parents. You feel caught between loyalty, belief, and peacekeeping. What role do you play?

6. The Teen in Youth Group

You help with your parish youth group, and while at a retreat for the male high school students, one of them pulls you aside and quietly tells you he thinks he might be bisexual. He states he hasn't told anyone else. He's scared of being rejected by his family and by the Church. He's also scared of how the other guys at the retreat would react if they found this out. What do you say?

7. The Workplace Conversation

At work, a new colleague, Tina, mentions her wife in passing during lunch. Later that afternoon, you and another co-worker are talking privately about a project at your desk. When the conversation is wrapping up, your co-worker drops her voice and says, *Can you believe Tina's a lesbian? She doesn't look like one.* There's a pause while your co-worker waits for you to respond. What do you say?

8. The Family Member at a Baptism

Your cousin, who transitioned a few years ago, attends a family baptism. You notice that many family members appear uncomfortable around him, and some are avoiding eye contact. He approaches you warmly and asks how you've been. You've spoken a few times briefly since he transitioned, but haven't had a lengthy conversation. You feel unsure of your words, but you don't want to communicate distance. How do you engage?

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9. The Kids Will Be There

You've invited your close friend Elena to dinner and, without much thought, told her, of course, her wife should come too. You've been friends with Elena for years, but because you live so far away, your kids (ages 3 and 7) have heard about her but haven't met her, and you've never really explained what it means that she has a wife. You don't want to treat your friend like a problem, but you also take your responsibility as a parent and the formation of your children seriously. You don't want to cause moral confusion. What do you do?

10. A Parish Retreat

You're part of a small leadership team planning a parish retreat. The group is discussing potential speakers. You think Daniel could be a great fit. He's an experienced speaker, deeply prayerful, and has served the parish for years. He has also started sharing with people that he experiences same-sex attractions and has discerned a vocation to the single life. You decide suggest Daniel as an option. A staff member responds, *I just wonder if that might complicate things. I'm not sure it sends the right message to have someone like him in a leadership role.* How do you respond?