

SMALL
GROUP
GUIDES
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Building a Bridge

*How the Catholic Church and the
LGBT Community Can Enter
into a Relationship of Respect,
Compassion, and Sensitivity*

JAMES MARTIN, SJ

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A NOTE TO THE READER: HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The following reading and discussion guide has been designed to be read alongside the first part of Father Martin's book, his essay "A Two-Way Bridge" (pp. 15–76), and to help you, or your community, to more deeply reflect on his invitation to the Catholic Church and the LGBT community to draw together. We hope that this guide enables you to more fully grasp his contribution to this important conversation.

After his essay, Father Martin has included "a series of biblical passages that have proven helpful for LGBT Catholics, as well as brief reflections on those passages." Of course, these passages and reflections are also for everyone: "for LGBT allies, for their parents, for their friends, and for the entire church—including parishes and dioceses, priests and bishops."

We encourage everyone reading his essay to consider these passages, his meditations, and reflection questions.

WHY I'M WRITING

1. James Martin, SJ, writes, "The LGBTQ community is still invisible in many quarters of the church. . . . The work of the Gospel cannot be accomplished if one part of the church is essentially separated from any other part. Between the two groups, the LGBT community and the institutional church, a chasm has formed, a separation for which a bridge needs to be built" (p. 2).

How familiar are you with the chasm he describes? In which group or part would you place yourself? In your opinion, why does this divide exist today?

2. What would it mean for both the church and the LGBT community to treat each other with “respect, compassion, and sensitivity,” three virtues outlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*? (p. 5). What might have to change? What could stay the same?
3. “Many people see the church as contributing to division, as some Christian leaders and their congregations mark off boundaries of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ But the church works best when it embodies the virtues of respect, compassion, and sensitivity” (p. 8). What examples can you think of where Christians mark off these boundaries? What examples can you think of where Christians refuse to do so? What effect does each approach have?
4. “For most LGBT people at any age, however, the process of understanding that they are loved by God as they are and the process of finding their place in the church remain difficult ones” (p. 10). Why is this so? Have you or a loved one ever experienced this?

A TWO-WAY BRIDGE

1. Father Martin suggests that much of the tension between the Catholic Church in the United States and

the LGBT Catholic community results from “a lack of communication and a good deal of mistrust between LGBT Catholics and the hierarchy” (p. 17). In response to this, he proposes building “a bridge between that community and the church” (p. 19). Why do you think he uses the image of a bridge here? What does he gain by doing so?

**THE “FIRST LANE”:
FROM THE CHURCH TO THE LGBT COMMUNITY**

Respect

1. Father Martin calls for “respect” from the church to the LGBT community, writing, “First of all, *respect* means, at the very least, recognizing that the LGBT community *exists*, and extending to it the same recognition that any community desires and deserves because of its presence among us” (p. 20). In your own experience, does the church recognize that the LGBT community exists? Why does something that seems so simple mean so much?
2. Have you been positively influenced by the gifts of LGBT Catholics (p. 24)? What have these gifts been? And how might you honor them?
3. How do you show LGBT people respect?

Compassion

1. “The first and most essential requirement is listening” (p. 33). Think about the LGBT people in your life. What would it mean to listen to them even more fully? What might you have to do differently? Why do you think listening is essential?
2. “Catholic leaders regularly publish statements—as they should—defending the unborn, refugees and migrants, the poor, the homeless, the aged. . . . But where are statements specifically in support of our LGBT brothers and sisters?” (p. 36). In your opinion, is this a double standard? Why do you think it exists?
3. How do you show LGBT people compassion?

Sensitivity

1. Father Martin writes, “You cannot understand the feelings of a community if you don’t *know* the community” (pp. 40–41). How might you increase your proximity to the LGBT community? If you could do that, what might be the result?
2. “But for Jesus there was no ‘other.’ Jesus saw beyond categories; he met people where they were and accompanied them” (p. 43). What might Jesus’s words and deeds, and how he treated the marginalized, teach the

contemporary church about how to relate to the LGBT community? What might they teach you?

3. What Gospel passages do you think might apply to the invitation to treat LGBT people with “respect, compassion, and sensitivity”? What Gospel passages might relate to outreach to those who feel marginalized?
4. Beyond “respect, compassion, and sensitivity,” what other virtues does the church need to model when it reaches out to the LGBT community?
5. How do you show LGBT people sensitivity?

THE “SECOND LANE”:

FROM THE LGBT COMMUNITY TO THE CHURCH

Respect

1. To the LGBT Catholic community, Father Martin suggests, “This is the moment to set aside the us-and-them mentality, for there is no us and them in the church” (p. 50). Have you ever considered yourself an “us”? Have you ever felt like a “them”? What might it look like for the LGBT Catholic community to heed this advice?
2. Father Martin calls the LGBT community to show both “ecclesial and human respect” in its engagement with

- the institutional church (p. 52). How does he define both terms? Why are both needed?
3. Father Martin acknowledges that it might be difficult for LGBT Catholics to think about treating the institutional church with “respect, compassion, and sensitivity” because of the exclusion that many in this group have often felt. Even if it’s difficult, do you think it’s still important for members of a marginalized group to proceed in this way? Or would you call for a different approach?

Compassion

1. Father Martin lists the many duties of bishops on pages 57 to 58. Think about this long list. How many people, including members of the LGBT community, do you think are aware of those duties? How might being aware of those duties increase this community’s compassion for those in the church who work as bishops?
2. Speaking from his own experience, Father Martin notes, “One gay friend of mine said that he was particularly angry in the wake of the clergy sex-abuse crisis. After years of trying to stay with the church, despite feeling unwelcome, he felt deeply betrayed by the institution. ‘I was furious,’ he told me. How could he accept condemnations of his own sexuality from members

of the hierarchy who had covered up the crime of sex abuse?” (p. 62). In the face of such situations, how can the LGBT community acknowledge the issues that it has with the church without letting those issues prevent the building of the “two-way bridge” he calls for?

Sensitivity

1. “We need to be sensitive to the fact that when Vatican officials speak—whether the pope or a Vatican congregation—they are speaking to the whole world, not just the West, and certainly not just the United States” (p. 70). What could stand in the way of the LGBT community from receiving this invitation?
2. Father Martin mentions the important role of prophecy in the church. Why do you think he does this? Where have you seen the church act prophetically on various issues? How is prophecy relevant to helping the LGBT community grow in its sensitivity toward the church?

Together on the Bridge

1. Father Martin reminds both groups: “Neither lane on that bridge is smooth. On this bridge, as in life, there are tolls. It costs when you live a life of respect, compassion, and sensitivity” (pp. 74–75). What might living

in this way cost members of the LGBT community? Members of the church? What is at stake? What are you willing to pay in terms of “tolls”?

2. To the LGBT community, Father Martin asks, “What keeps the bridge standing? What keeps it from collapsing onto the sharp rocks? What keeps you from plunging into the dangerous waters below? The Holy Spirit” (p. 75). How does the Spirit support us individually and as a community? What is the role of the Spirit in building unity between these two groups? Do you really believe that all are welcome in God’s church?

FINAL QUESTIONS

1. How has Father Martin’s essay challenged you on this topic? How has it changed the way that you think?
2. “Respect, compassion, and sensitivity,” the three virtues from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, were mentioned often throughout this essay. In which of these virtues are you doing well? In which do you need to grow? Think about your answers specifically in terms of how you might more fully care for either the LGBT community or the church.
3. What virtues and actions, beyond what Father Martin suggests, might be needed to help build this bridge?

4. Whom might you need to have a conversation with—to listen to, to ask questions of—in order to move forward in building this bridge?
5. Where do you see signs of the Holy Spirit at work in the church's outreach to the LGBT community?