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Love and Marriage

Mary Ann McGivern | Jul. 5, 2013 NCR Today

I?m the oldest of seven. Two of my brothers were gay and died of AIDS in 1986 and 1988. During their illnesses, all of us in the family became close to their friends. We grew to love the gay community before we ever understood much about being gay. And that is exactly how attitudes in our society have changed so quickly, because people we love have told us their sexual orientation.

When my youngest brother Frank told me he was gay, he must have been HIV positive, though we didn?t know then that the virus even existed. But I did know a little about the bath house orgies and libertine behavior that occurred within the gay community. So I asked him if he had a partner. When he said no, I encouraged him to find one. I think I said, ?Love isn?t a disease. Love is a good thing.?

And that is the truth. Love isn?t a disease. I?m a Catholic sister. I?ve made a vow of celibacy. Nonetheless, I know a little about love. I see divorces and happy second marriages. I have seen infidelity and cruelty in relationships as well as faithful joy. So have you. We all know the power of our own sexuality. We have reason, born of experience, to be cautious in the rules we establish and the judgments we render on others.

I am thinking a lot of my brothers Joe and Frank as I listen and read about the unconstitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act and varied responses of gays, politicians, leaders in various faith communities. Joe and Frank died when they were 33 and 30. They should have had more hope for happiness than the world gave them. I am so grateful that the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered communities can be open about their sexual orientation and that today the joys of family life are open to them.

Where does that put me within the moral teaching of the church? Count me as someone with difficulties.

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