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*Open letter from the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups  
to the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, gathered at Crete, June 2016*

Your All-Holiness, Holinesses, Beatitudes, Eminences and Graces,  
dear Fathers, brothers and sisters, dear delegates of the Holy and Great Council,

The European Forum of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Christian Groups, an ecumenical association of more than 40 groups from across Europe, representing approximately 6,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Christians, would like to take the opportunity presented by the meeting of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church—an event of historical importance—to draw the attention of the leaders of the Orthodox Church to the situation of their LGBT faithful, a situation that should concern us all.

**We are not outside, we are inside**

Even though LGBT people are quite often presented as being a group external to the Orthodox Church, the European Forum of LGBT Groups can testify that, in fact, the proportion of people of non-traditional sexual orientation and gender identity is the same within the Orthodox Church as it is outside. This has become clear to us through our many activities related to Eastern Europe and thanks to the presence of Orthodox Christians among our member groups.

As the experience of many religious communities and contexts shows, the struggle of reconciling within oneself the “religious” and “sexual” parts of one’s identity is one of the hardest burdens that a believer can face, especially when one’s own community refuses to acknowledge one’s presence or calls one an enemy.

*We ask you: in your sermons and speeches, whenever you mention LGBT persons and issues, remember that we actually might be standing right before you! We are not an abstract concept, but actual human beings—your children, sisters, and brothers.*

**Stories of sorrow**

We have heard numerous stories from LGBT Orthodox people—stories of internal conflict and pain. So often, a strong commitment to remain in the Orthodox Church clashes with acknowledging the truth about oneself. Some of us have accepted our sexuality, some are only raising questions; some have decided to live according to our conscience and “come out,” some have not taken any action and just accepted the fact of their sexual identity.

But in so many cases, these realities are intolerable for the Orthodox community. Many LGBT Orthodox Christians have been thrown out of their parishes, barred from the Holy Communion, required to undergo conversion therapy with harmful effects on their personality, compelled to choose monastic life for which they had neither predisposition nor vocation, or forced to enter into heterosexual marriages and, through this, bring pain to more people (their spouses, children, and families). Often, these experiences of violence or imposed self-destruction are making Orthodox people angry with God and in some cases lead them out of the Church altogether. Some Orthodox LGBT persons, unable to hear God's voice clearly, being confused, drained of strength and the will to persevere, and unsupported by their pastors, communities, and even families, take their own lives.

The Orthodox value of humble daring, especially when advocating and interceding for others, is pushing us forward to urge you to reconsider the current situation of LGBT Orthodox Christians.

*We ask you: do everything you can to stop this violence and aggression! Too often, those who shout words of hatred claim to base them in the holy Orthodox Tradition. We plead with you, beloved teachers and guardians of our Tradition: do not let it be misused to bring death and destroy human lives! Let love and care precede admonition.*

### **Space for dialogue**

We, your LGBT Orthodox children, believe that, though all human sexuality can be a vehicle for sin, in essence human sexuality is a gift from God, part of his good creation. We want to be clear, therefore, that we are advocating for all people in their variety of sexual orientations and gender identities, not for the sinful misuse of either of these things.

We believe that Holy Scripture and the Orthodox Tradition offer many examples of consolation and blessing for the diverse reality of human sexuality, which includes LGBT persons and their relations. We are aware that our understanding of Holy Scripture and Orthodox theology as enabling the harmonious reconciliation of our sexual and religious identities may seem audacious—but we ask you to hear us out. We urge you to establish safe spaces for dialogue: situations and places where those of differing views can share not only their opinions, but also their doubts and personal stories. We want this conversation to be a dialogue, in which both sides treat each other as equal partners, with respect, on account of different knowledge and experience, listening to each other and answering each other's questions.

*We ask you for the gift of your trust. We ask you to accept that our appeal is guided by our faith and our concern for the good of the Church and her children. We ask you to pray and talk with us.*

Yours in Christ,

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