



## **NAMES & PLACES AT SYNODAL TABLES**

### ***A SUBMISSION FROM THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH WORKING GROUP OF THE EUROPEAN FORUM OF LGBTI+ CHRISTIAN GROUPS***

Varese, Sunday, May 12, 2024

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The European Forum of LGBTI+ Christian Groups (EF) is an association of 47 member groups from 21 countries in Europe representing approximately 6.000 members. The EF Roman Catholic Church Working Group consists of member-groups and individuals from 15 countries. The groups represented are: La Communauté du Christ Libérateur (Belgium), AG Schwule Theologie e.V., Ökumenische Arbeitsgruppe Homosexuelle und Kirche (HuK) e.V. (Germany), Mozaik Közösség (Hungary), Cammini di Speranza (Italy), Drachma (Malta), Werkgroep van Katholieke Homo-Pastores (Netherlands), Fundacja Wiara i Tęcza (Poland), Nuntiare et Recreare (Russia), Signum - Dúhová kresťania (Slovakia), Christian Organisation of Lesbians (Switzerland), Associació Cristiana de Gais i Lesbianes de Catalunya, Ichthys, Crismhom (Spain), Quest, and LGBT+ Catholics Westminster Pastoral Council (UK).

This Submission draws on discernment conversations conducted over four [Synodal Webinars from February to April 2024](#) on the themes: (1) The Relevance of the Synodal Process for LGBTI+ People ; (2) Fiducia Supplicans & the Synodal Process - Developing Blessings for Same-gender Couples ; (3) Understanding Vulnerabilities of LGBTI+ People ; (4) Fleshing out the Unity of Love & Truth and builds on our first submission from August 2022 ["For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected"](#).

#### **1. CALLED BY OUR NAMES**

In welcoming the October 2023 Synodal Synthesis Report and the Synod Secretariat's Guidelines for work in view of the 2024 Assembly, as well as informal reports of



Conversations-in-the-Spirit and theologians' inputs into the Synodal discussions, we appreciate the developments achieved but we nevertheless strongly regret that LGBTI+ Catholics were not named in these official documents. "Con-versatio-n", in its roots, means not simply uttering words but a movement 'with' and 'towards the other'. We were not acknowledged as 'other' to be included, but to remain 'beyond the tent'.

Synodal participation is not just to 'be part', passively, of the process, but includes 'taking part' in a praxis of co-responsibility, witnessing that the Spirit will not let us go. Such baptismally-rooted participation is as members of a large family sitting at the same table, not as bystanders at the edge of the table, watching others be nourished. LGBTI+ Catholics are 'co-heirs with Christ' by their baptism, with the same rights and responsibilities as other people of God.

The force of ideological bias by those opposed to a more generous and radical pastoral inclusion of LGBTI+ Catholics in the Church's life and structures appears to have prevented us being called by our name [Synthesis Report 15 b) & g)]. LGBTI+ Catholics, especially in those countries which continue to criminalise and/or inflict the death penalty, are demonised rather than respected, subjected to marginalisation rather than integrated into the Body of Christ which is the people of God. We therefore call for the involvement of LGBTI+ Catholics, parents, and families from across the globe in the October 2024 Assembly, and in the work of the Synodal Study Groups over the next two years and beyond. We ask that the Synod speaks with us, not about us.

## 2. **DEEPENING & BROADENING SYNODALITY**

We particularly welcome the acknowledgment in the Synodal Process, so far, that the contribution of 'theological and canonical expertise, as well as the relevant human and social sciences', as well as the involvement of those who are 'directly affected by the matters under consideration' is indispensable [Synthesis Report, 16 h), 18 k), f)]. We urge that these proposals become more explicit in the October 2024 *Instrumentum Laboris*.

We look for a disposition of going out to the peripheries of both Church and society, not as the predominant teacher, having all the answers, but with a degree of humility, openness, receptivity to learn, to listen, and to hear from different realities, cultures, situations (cf. John 13.13-14). This is not against the Church's role but a prerequisite for being a magisterial Church which starts from where people are, learning their language, as they give their stories of integrating faith, humanity, sexuality and gender identity.

The Church has to be a learning Church, that has to experiment, discovering what works and what does not, what it gets wrong and where it journeys along an authentic path of reality as it searches and develops. The model for inclusion of minorities is the Council of Jerusalem where the apostles are present not as control-agents but as witnesses to what the Spirit is doing. They are not threatened by the Spirit but a consensus is achieved: '*It seems good to us and to the Holy Spirit.*' The minimal conditions are set to enable everyone to sit at the same table. We, in variety and unity, sit together in how we are as the diverse community of God's people. We look to the ongoing Synodal Process to enable this to happen more openly and visibly.



### 3. CHALLENGES TO SYNODAL WAYS OF WORKING

We welcome the Church's new openness to blessing men and women living in complex situations of loving relationship (cf. *Amoris Laetitia* N. 299), the affirmation of universal human rights and the decriminalisation of sexual orientation and gender identity. The fact that LGBTI+ Catholics are officially accepted as 'bless-able' clearly challenges the false language of 'objective moral evil' or 'intrinsic disorder'. To many parents of LGBTI+ Catholics, striving to hold to what they have seen as the Church's teachings, *Fiducia Supplicans* offers them ways to affirm their offspring.

However, the processes leading to the publication of the DDF Declarations, *Fiducia Supplicans* and *Dignitas Infinita* have caused confusion, frustration and anger. They appear to have evolved in a non-Synodal way, without consultation with those directly affected, nor those engaged in creating liturgical celebrations or pastoral accompaniment and practice. They also seem to promote a legalistic rather than a truly pastoral application.

Given the omission of 'blessings' in the 2023 Synthesis, we are concerned that these Declarations are being used to divert or control Spirit-led Synodal conversations and to avoid controversial questions. We hope that these recent developments relating both to same-gender relationships and gender identity will not provoke a backlash in the October 2024 Synodal Assembly.

### 4. UNDERSTANDING THE VULNERABILITIES OF LGBTI+ PEOPLE

LGBTI+ Catholics experience a wide range of vulnerabilities, some of which arise from social and ecclesial marginalisation. As the Synod attempts to give voice to those whose voice is never or seldom heard, we welcome the space and time for such listening processes. However, we note that the Continental Phase Reports, hardly focus on this.

For example, there is no mentioning of the lessons the global church learned from the HIV pandemic in many countries, which so heavily impacted gay men, black African women, men and children, migrant labourers, and trans sex-workers. The Church hierarchies should offer an apology to these communities for its complicity in not preventing the spread of this pandemic by opposing sexual-health education programmes and other HIV prevention policies.

Many times members of the LGBTI+ community, especially migrant trans women and LGBTI+ persons trapped in refugee camps, suffer multiple stigmatisations and violence for who they are. A Synodal Church should begin to reflect on a Passion-theology and spirituality of affliction in this and other contexts.

We welcome the recent statements by Vatican Dicastries and Pope Francis himself supporting the decriminalisation of sexual orientation and gender identity and call for a robust challenge and discipline to those bishops' conferences which continue to support or tolerate such criminalisation and the death penalty. Such governmental and hierarchical policies also affect the pastoral ministries of those clergy, pastoral workers, health-care



workers and counsellors who seek to walk with LGBTI+ people, particularly refugees and asylum seekers, even making them liable to legal penalties. Homophobia and transphobia are existential realities for LGBTI+ Catholics in these countries, and not simply negative social attitudes.

## 5. **FLESHING OUT THE UNITY OF LOVE AND TRUTH**

When love and truth meet, justice will flow (Ps.85:11-12) and so the radical inclusion of LGBTI+ Catholics in a Synodal Church is a work of justice and not solely a question of theological abstraction. If something is not loving, it is not truthful, and if it is not true, it is not loving. Historic magisterial documents on sexual orientation point to a bad use of this principle when they state that any LGBTI+ pastoral ministry must, in order to be loving, be based on truth, but it has been the DDF's own particular definitions of love and truth on which it rests.

LGBTI+ Catholics, including gay clergy, have tried, over many years, to become truthful, and with increasing numbers of theologians, to re-read what natural law means for LGBTI+ people as truth-bearing witnesses. This should be considered as an enrichment in assisting and understanding, instead of rejecting fellow Catholics who search for God. This journey must be brought into what now constitutes the Synodal pathway both in any future Synodal Report and in the work of Synodal Study Groups, particularly in Study Group 9.

The question of how we en-flesh love and truth must go beyond an abstract compromise formula as used in past documents. Truth is not external to human beings, beamed down on us by deduction and applied to us. A more modern concept of truthfulness is that by which we become bearers of truth as we learn to love and accept being loved, and so be recognised as such.

While a theological anthropology could be updated, the Church should be cautious about dressing this in a narrow concept of bodiliness, but rather draw from the insights of human and social sciences. We do not need a new fundamentalism [Synthesis Report, 15 g) k)]. There needs to be further reflection on the role of subjectivity in the development of theology. LGBTI+ sexuality and gender identity are not pathologies but rather minority variants in the human condition.

The unity of love and truth should not be used in a rhetorical way, twisted into a polemic tool, for dismissing moral or ethical claims. An example is the commonly-used but non-biblical 'love the sinner, but not the sin' which begs endless questions. However, having a clear sense of what the unity of love and truth means, can help to counteract the abuses of the principle which promote injustice. This enables us to assert that love demands that LGBTI+ Catholics are treated in ways which actively benefit, that our fight for justice cannot be dismissed, and suffering ignored.

Synodality is a way of living out in truth and love the communion at the heart of the Church's life in the Eucharist, where we come together in a bond of love. Without the truth which makes that love authentic there can be no real Synodality. A world without an authentic commitment to love and truth for LGBTI+ Catholics would be a nightmare, and it's misuse makes it still so for many.



## CONCLUSION

Overall we find ourselves in an early springtime of gradual LGBTI+ affirmation in the Catholic Church after a long winter of profoundly negative rhetoric from some parts of the Magisterium, though there are still regions that are craving for the thaw. Within LGBTI+ Catholic communities we find a rich treasure of theological, sociological, medical and psychological expertise. This can be drawn upon to enable the whole Church to create, with and for LGBTI+ Catholics, parents, and families, spaces where faith, gender and sexuality can be fully integrated. We look to the Synodal Journey to invite us to the table where we will all be called by name.

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