



## **A SUBMISSION FROM THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH WORKING GROUP OF THE EUROPEAN FORUM OF LGBTI+ CHRISTIAN GROUPS FOR THE ATTENTION OF SYNODAL STUDY GROUP 9.**

May 2025

### **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 13 countries. The groups represented are: La Communauté du Christ Libérateur (Belgium), D-J Arc-en-Ciel (France), AG Schwule Theologie e.V., Ökumenische Arbeitsgruppe Homosexuelle und Kirche (HuK) e.V. (Germany), Mozaik Közösség (Hungary), Cammini di Speranza, La Tenda di Gionata (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).

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

LGBTI+ Catholics, parents and families welcome continuing opportunities to engage in the Church's Synodal dialogue in which the realities of our lives and faith can be part of an ecclesial conversation. Conversation-in-the-Spirit has enabled many in the people of God to listen deeply and speak freely, boldly, and honestly, bringing with it the obligation to speak the truth for the common good, even at personal risk. We appreciate the encounters achieved thus far but we nevertheless strongly regret that LGBTI+ Catholics' experience of integrating faith, gender and sexuality was neither named explicitly, nor valued in the October 2024 Synodal 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'. 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

The Synodal journey 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 being nourished. LGBTI+ Catholics are 'co-heirs with Christ' by their baptism, with the same rights and responsibilities as other people of God. It is in this spirit that we wish to engage with Study Group 9. We also call for the active involvement of LGBTI+ Catholics, parents, and families from across the world, particularly in the journey towards the Rome Ecclesial Assembly planned for October 2028. As we ourselves create spaces of dialogue with the wider ecclesial community, we ask that the Synodal Church speaks with us, and 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 that of the involvement of those who are 'directly affected by the matters under consideration' is indispensable [*Synthesis Report*, 16 h), 18 k), f)].

We continue to 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. We are not outside; we are part of the Church, in which the existence of believers from LGBTI+ backgrounds is a given. We are reminded of the Gospel story of the prodigal son. Like him, LGBTI+ people maybe considered "outside", but we are and remain the children of the generous parent, who keeps the door open for our sake. LGBTI+ Catholics have a role in the evangelisation of the secular realities with which they engage and can thus be included in those who practice a 'ministry of accompaniment', bringing good news to those who have not yet heard its Gospel of liberation or its vision of a new humanity in Christ.

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 rainbow 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 'blessable' 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 with those engaged in creating liturgical celebrations or pastoral accompaniment and practice. They also seem to promote a legalistic rather than a truly pastoral application.

## 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 focused on this.



For example, there is no mention 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 when 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 positive Passion-theology and spirituality of affliction in this and other contexts, at the same time avoiding a scapegoating promotion of victimology. Ours is not a cross to be borne but a coming-out in resurrection light.

We welcome the recent statements by Vatican Dicasteries 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. OUR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR DIGNITY, SAFETY AND RIGHTS OF LGBTI+ PEOPLE**

During the last years, the world has seen an immense increase of extreme right-wing, populist governments who make the humiliation of minorities based on sexual orientation and gender identities together with migrants and ethnic minorities the core of their policies. Countries like Hungary and Russia have made several steps to withdraw fundamental rights from LGBTI+ people, such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and protection against discrimination.

In this context we, LGBTI+ Catholics, defend the basic Christian values of inclusion, welcome and openness in a world that in many places appears on a path towards destruction of diversity of any kind. We are at the side of the defenceless in the Catholic Church and in the world, and we advocate and protect them. Our voices are heard in the Catholic families that engendered us, in the Church communities that baptized us, and where we contribute and may lead, in Catholic schools, youth organisations, in hospitals, in elderly homes, in Catholic organisations of all kind.

When the Church operates in such countries, we request her leaders to acknowledge their responsibility when they remain silent or even supportive. By not speaking up against the persecution, intimidation and oppression of LGBTI+ people by the state they fail to live up to the current existing teachings of the Catholic Church. We are one universal Church after all, where we are all mutually responsible for each other. "Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

## **6. 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 to their *individual* nature. 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 and into 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**

When the Synodal Process started, we hoped to 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. But we were disappointed by the fact that LGBTI+ issues have not been taken into consideration by the Synodal Assembly in a meaningful way. In some of our members this has caused "Synod fatigue".

However, 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 so that we can make our contribution towards a more realistic and just theology of sexuality and gender.

## **CONTACTS:**

Michael Brinkschröder - Chair, EF Roman Catholic Church Working Group [michael.brinkschroeder@web.de](mailto:michael.brinkschroeder@web.de)  
Miroslav Maťavka - Secretary, EF Roman Catholic Church Working Group [miro@duhovi-krestania.sk](mailto:miro@duhovi-krestania.sk)  
Martin Pendergast - Secretary, LGBT+ Catholics Westminster Pastoral Council  
[secretary@lgbtcatholicswestminster.org](mailto:secretary@lgbtcatholicswestminster.org)

European Forum of LGBTI+ Christian Groups, Nieuwe Herengracht 49, 1011 RN Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
<https://www.lgbtchristians.eu>