



**Report to the  
Secretariat of the Synod  
from the Global Network  
of Rainbow Catholics**

*November 2022*

# Introduction

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The **Global Network of Rainbow Catholics (GNRC)** is very grateful to have this opportunity to add the voices of LGBTIQ and Ally Catholics from around the world to the Synodal process. We are excited to answer Pope Francis' call to voice our hopes, dreams, and challenges in living as Catholics who also identify as sexual or gender minorities, or as their loved ones.

GNRC brings together groups and their members who work for pastoral care, justice, inclusion, dignity, and equality for LGBTIQ Catholics and their families in the Roman Catholic Church and the wider society. Founded in 2015, GNRC currently represents 48 different organizations in 35 nations on every inhabited continent.

GNRC conducted a Listening Session for our members and friends in conjunction with our Fourth General Assembly, held in Mexico City 9-15 September 2022. Approximately 45 people were present for this Assembly in person, and another 50 people joined online. The Listening Session was conducted in English and Spanish, and people were able to hear, read, and respond to questions in their native language. This report is based upon transcriptions of the Listening Session, as well as viewing a recording of the Session.



# Process

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Due to having a relatively brief time (90 minutes) to conduct this session, as well as the need for every question or statement to be conveyed in both Spanish and English, the session focused on just three (3) questions. The first two questions were posed to and responded to by the entire group using both a response app that consolidated input (Mentimeter), and in verbal feedback. Those questions were:

- As an LGBTIQ Catholic or Ally, what have been your joys in your journey of faith?
- What experiences in the Church have brought you pain, disappointment, or exclusion?

For the final question, those in person were grouped by native language in groups of five to six (5-6) people, with a volunteer note-taker recording responses. They were asked to consider this question:

- What is your most important message to Pope Francis and the Synod of Bishops? What do you most hope to see as a result of the Synod?

Responses were collected and translated for the drafting of this report. It must be noted that people participating online are represented primarily through responses to the first two questions. Due to the diversity of languages among online participants, most opted not to submit any responses to the final question.



## Question 1:

**As an LGBTIQ Catholic or Ally,  
what have been your joys in your  
journey of faith?**

The overwhelming response to this question indicated that participants found deep connection in sharing their faith with others in spiritual community. Being in community with other people of faith, becoming friends or partners with others who love the church, and sharing faith experiences with family members were all mentioned as significant blessings. One person summed this joy up as having received “a present that will last forever in life.” Participants also spoke a great deal about the importance of mission, service to others, and faith as something to rely on through challenges and difficult times. Key responses are captured in the word cloud below.





Some participants spoke of the ways they have served as evangelists for our faith, even as openly LGBTIQ people. A man from Mexico said he felt proud of “My encounter with hopeless people, who thought they would go to hell, but bringing them back to the church and giving hope.” Similarly, a woman from Peru, noted “Bringing young people who had no hope in life, who were thinking about suicide, but once part of community, found rekindled hope” gave her great joy. A man from England found joy in “Getting people back who had been away from church 25-30 years and creating community.” He went on to say he loved helping to give these individuals a “sense of homecoming.”

Members of GNRC express deep love for the church’s sacraments, find inspiration in the lives of saints who persisted in faith despite extraordinary trials, and have great respect for the priests, women religious, and lay leaders of the church. In spite of nearly all having experienced some discrimination within the church, they persist in claiming their place in the church, being part of the church’s mission of service, and offering their gifts to the community.



## Question 2:

### **What experiences in the Church have brought you pain, disappointment, or exclusion?**

As LGBTIQ Catholics and Allies, GNRC members identify as people who have experienced discrimination, exclusion, and inequality within our church. They are deeply aware of church teachings, statements by church leaders, and pastoral practices that cause pain for LGBTIQ people and family member. Participants describe a range of reactions to these experiences, from pain, self-doubt, anger, and even despair. In this segment of the session, many also brought stories of friends who have left the church due to feeling unwelcome, or in response to judgmental statements made to them personally or by a church leader. Speakers addressed the pain of trying to remain part of a church that excludes so many, and of having to defend their decision to continue identifying as Catholic. One participant said “the church can be Hell for LGBT people.”

Participants also addressed what they saw as hypocrisy within the church. Some spoke of priests and bishops who are themselves gay being among those who promoted “hate and exclusion” most intensely. They saw this as an abuse of power. Others contrasted anti-LGBTIQ efforts with the failures to fully address clergy sexual abuse. The church’s lack of healthy and realistic approach to sexuality and human relationships, clericalism, and misogyny were all mentioned as issues that needed to be addressed.





One speaker said that the “majority of my LGBT Catholic friends have left the church. They have been told hurtful things, that they were sinners and dirty. Priests are passing judgment on people.” A former teacher said the principal at her school told her she was fired after learning the teacher is Lesbian. The principal told the woman that she was to have absolutely no interaction with any of the female students, and that her life was “against the Gospel.” However, since it was late in the school year, the teacher offered to complete the year, with the principal observing her in class. After weeks of watching, the principal apologized, and told the teacher, “You are an excellent teacher and care very much for your students. They are lucky to have you.” The teacher stayed on in the school until her retirement, receiving excellent feedback on her teaching every year.

A GNRC leader from Europe spoke about his meeting with a church official, and about recounting the demeaning and hurtful language he and others had encountered from priests during an LGBTIQ human rights campaign in their country. The church leader listened intently and apologized for the pain the church had caused. The man described this as a “moment of healing and transformation.”

It was clear throughout the session that the pain was intense, deep, and universal. However, these GNRC members have chosen to persevere, to hold the pain alongside their love for the church, and to help heal the pain that so many have experienced. As one speaker said, “We are here because we have decided to turn the other cheek because of our love of Jesus.”



## **Question 3:**

**What is your most important message to Pope Francis and the Synod of Bishops?**

**What do you most hope to see as a result of the Synod?**

For this question, participants were grouped by native language so that they could express their responses most comfortably. Each group of five to six participants had a note-taker that recorded key ideas. Some of these suggestions were discussed in a plenary session, and the notes were submitted to the GNRC secretary. These submissions, along with notes from the plenary discussion, were used to develop this report.

The main theme of the participants' hopes for the Synod was that it leads to a more inclusive and loving church. As one person in a Spanish-language group said, "We must be a church that acts as Jesus did when he encountered the excluded." Another said, "The church must recognize our lives and loves, our identities and marriages." A third noted that the concerns and joys of LGBTIQ+ people must be spoken of openly at all levels of the church, saying, "When things aren't said, they don't exist. Things have to be said by name." An English-speaking group member said it was "important for all of the sacraments be open to everyone, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Exclusion from the full life of the church causes too much pain."







Many hoped that the Synod would address the role of priests and nuns in ministering to LGBTIQ+ people. They want priests and nuns to be able to deal with their own sexualities and gender identities in safer, healthier ways. One person put it this way: "The clergy will not accept sexual diversity until they support their own." Others called for church officials to "stop the witch-hunt" against those who minister with Diversity groups.

A number of participants urged the establishment of a Council on Gender and Sexuality that would develop effective ways of ensuring that LGBTIQ+ people, allies, and family members become full and equal members of the church, and have their pastoral needs met.

One Spanish-language group created a letter to Pope Francis. Their letter to "Papa Francesco" reiterated their love for the church, and their hope that the Synod could help lessen the pain felt by LGBTIQ+ Catholics. They asked for "an official pastoral that recognizes us and helps us get closer to the heart and be an active part of the church."

Finally, there were hopes that the Synod would lead to changes in official teaching about LGBTIQ+ people. Participants noted that the current language is dehumanizing, demeaning, and can be used to justify violence towards members of our community. It feels very inconsistent with Catholic teachings that recognize every person as created and loved by God. While participants recognized that the Synod will not be able to make these changes, and may not even clearly propose them, it is hoped that this theme will emerge as a priority for Vatican consideration.



# Conclusion

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Those who were able to participate in the GNRC Synod Listening Session represent a tiny minority of LGBTIQ+ Catholics and Allies around the world. They took their responsibility to speak on behalf of their friends, family members, and colleagues seriously. They recognized doing this as part of their Baptismal rights and duties, as well as a response to the Synod's invitation to voices from the margins to speak their truths. "We are family, and we only need to be visible," said one participant. Participants sincerely hope that their input is heard and considered with open hearts. All involved pledge their prayers and continued participation in the Synodal process as that is possible.

Respectfully submitted by  
**the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics.**

