

Global Network of Rainbow Catholics was very proud to have so many of our member groups present at the World Youth Day in Lisbon. Despite not being officially recognised by the programme organisers or by the Vatican, collectively CaDiv from Portugal, Ichtys and Crismhom from Spain and DignityUSA were there in force to be witnesses and to be present in what Pope Francis described and saw as a Church where everyone was included, when he exclaimed “Todos, Todos, Todos”.

Our members created a safe space called Centro Arco-Iris where our LGBTI+ pilgrims could meet to discuss, share and learn from each other. Fr. James Alison, our openly gay priest and theologian was there to offer workshops, and there was a screening of the *Wonderfully Made* film with a Q&A session with the film makers. The organizers would have loved to have Fr. James Martin involved in their programme but given his high profile and busy schedule, that was impossible. However, it was good to know that Fr. James Martin was able to share some enjoyable time with the groups afterwards.

Our young pilgrims joined in the many beautiful public events and rejoiced in the welcoming and inclusive spaces that they encountered where the love of Christ ruled in most people’s hearts. However, a small group of individuals with hatred in their hearts chose to attack our members in what should be the safe and sacred space of Mass. The Police had to be called to prevent any further disruption and harm towards our members. Elsewhere, on another occasion our members from Dignity felt so threatened during the Vigil that they left in fear.

GNRC Co Chair Marianne Duddy-Burke was devastated to hear about the traumatic experiences that the young DignityUSA members encountered and said *“Our young LGBTI+ pilgrims were excited and overjoyed to hear such welcoming and inclusive messages from Pope Francis. Then to hear about the anguish and trauma that they faced is just painful to bear. But we know that their faith is strong and that it always overcomes hatred”*.

*“Our pilgrims were there to witness to the fact that many LGBTIQ+ people and their families are deeply committed to their Catholic faith. We are members of the Church and seek to grow and to serve, alongside other members. It is tragic that incidents of harassment, theft, and violence toward them occurred.”*

And, in the safe space at Centro Arco-Iris, our members were threatened and had violent actions directed at them that they sought refuge in a police station.

And then there were the subtle, though just as unnerving, acts like silently being handed a tea bag by a priest from an English Diocese with the words “Let’s have a proper brew” takes on menacing connotations under such difficult circumstances. And, especially so when this act is done without a smile and without eye contact.

Chris Vella Co Chair for GNRC said that he was proud of the young LGBTI+ pilgrims *“They conducted themselves with the love of Christ burning in their hearts and shone a beacon of truth and beauty that can extinguish all manner of hatred.”*

And, in the joint statement from our member groups who were there *“We pray constantly for the conversion of those “hearts of stone” who suffer and make others to suffer by not allowing participation in the legacy of Christ to all believers. We hope that the faith, love, and courage that these young LGTBQIA+ Pilgrims extended throughout this week will remain in the eyes, minds and hearts of many of the participants, who expressed their welcome and support.”*

Our thanks and prayers to our members who with humility and love were there to proudly represent our LGBTI+ communities.

<https://www.evangelicodigital.com/mundo/27934/el-orgullo-gay-en-la-jmj-de-lisboa>

<https://escucha.madrid/entidades-lgtbi-catolicas-piden-al-papa-francisco-gestos-concretos/>

<https://www.vidanuevadigital.com/2023/08/05/lisboa-la-primera-jmj-con-presencia-oficial-de-la-comunidad-cristiana-lgtbi/>