

JANUARY 14, 2018

**GNRC NEWSLETTER N°5**

Catholic LGBTI News around the world



**Hear a Just Cause**  
(Psalm 17,1)



**Global Network of Rainbow Catholics Second Assembly**

The Second Assembly of the GNRC – November 30th to December 3rd 2017 – has now concluded and an amazing legacy for the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics will remain. It was a wonderful opportunity to strengthen the bonds among our members, and to also take major decisions as a unified community. From now on all of us at the GNRC acclaim “Hear a just a Cause” (Psalm 17, 1)

- Before the meeting, two interesting articles were released. An in depth [interview with Michael Brinkschroeder](#) and 4 testimonies about [the lives of LGBTI Catholics](#) around the world who helped prepare the vibes in Dachau.
- Later, more than 30 LGBTI Catholic and Christian groups gathered and officially joined the GNRC by signing the [Constitutive Act](#) as founder members. But their first mission was the discussion and approval of our [Constitution](#) and [Internal Regulations](#) documents, which are now officially registered under Italian law as of December 17th 2017.
- Also a new [GNRC Board](#) was elected for the period 2017 – 2019. Our Co-chairs Christopher Vella and Ruby Almeida – read Ruby’s Second Assembly [Opening Greetings](#) – have written an [inspiring letter](#) to our Community for the [continuity of the tasks discussed](#) during the regional pre-conferences and the working groups.
- Our appreciation goes to the Assembly organizers [HuK](#) and the [Queergottesdienst München](#). Their strong commitment to organise such a fantastic conference was evident every day and especially so during the [Inaugural Ceremony](#) on November 30th and the highly emotional [Mass celebrated in Munich](#) on December 2nd.
- During the gathering we promoted and will continue supporting the [fundraising campaign](#) for the translation into English of the Book “May your lips kiss mine” by our colleague [Eros Shaw](#). Take a sneak peak of it through its [introductory text](#) on our GNRC Website.
- At the end of the Assembly, a [Press Release](#) updated and summarized all the work undertaken in Dachau. Special thanks to the journalist [Corinna Mayer](#), who aided us during the Assembly with Media and PR support.

We would like to thank everyone who joined us in Dachau – see many of them in the [photo album of the Second Assembly](#) – and all those who remotely sent their comments, contributions and [video greetings](#). Get more information about the Assembly participants and sponsors through its [Statistics](#).

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all the GNRC Community!!!

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## A church that is open for gays and lesbians – Why it is worth reforming the church from within

The Catholic theologian, sociologist (PhD) and religious education teacher Michael Brinkschröder is gay. Instead of turning his back on the church, he is fighting for acceptance and equality for gays and lesbians in the Roman Catholic Church.

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It is the small steps that show that we are on the right way, says Brinkschröder. In 2002 he and others celebrated their first queer church service that soon became a monthly institution in Munich. By founding the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics, he established a network of LGBTIQ Catholics from around the globe. From November 30th to December 3rd 2017, a conference of almost 100 Rainbow Catholics will be held in Dachau and Munich. Under the motto "Hear a just cause," participants at the conference will discuss how they can hone their strategy for the future. Their goal is ambitious, to say the least: They want the pontiff to openly state that all Catholics are equal – be they gay, bisexual or

straight, queer or transgender – both within and outside the church.

In an interview with Corinna Mayer, Michael Brinkschröder explains how to build bridges towards tolerance and mutual understanding, and why it is worth fighting for a change within the church:

***Mr Brinkschröder, you are a Catholic theologian, religious education teacher and a gay man. Do many of your students, see a contradiction in this?***

When I come out to my pupils in class they realize pretty quickly that there is an unresolved dispute between me and what the church says. When they ask me if there are problems resulting from this, I answer truthfully "Yes, there are". For example, I am not allowed to get married. As soon as I would do so, I would lose my permission to teach religious education. It happens quite often that students then side with me and express their rather critical view on the church's position in that matter. It has been one of the cornerstones of my teaching principles that I am open for students to express criticism, for dealing with controversial points of view and to share new perspectives. My current class was bored with reading parts of the Bible. So, I suggested looking at these passages from a queer angle. They picked up on the idea immediately because they thought it would make for a more compelling reading of the Scripture. And I hope that by doing so they learn how to find a closer connection to the Bible.

***When and why did you decide to fight for the acceptance of gays and lesbians within the Catholic Church?***

I had been studying theology at university for some time when I realized that I was gay. This revelation confronted me with a tough choice: either to follow my professional career or to live openly as a gay man. To do both simultaneously was unimaginable to me at that time. It took me a year to make up my mind. At the end of that year it became clear to me that both aspects of my life are vital to me, my faith and my identity. That was the moment when I decided to fight. Because I was denied the chance to get a PhD in theology, I did a lot of research on the roots of the Christian homophobia within the church from a sociological perspective instead. I am proud to say that I am happy today teaching religious education and I have found my calling to do everything I can to make the Catholic Church fully accept gays and lesbians as equal members of their community.

***From November 30th to December 3rd, rainbow Catholics from all over the world will gather under the motto "Hear a just cause" – taken from Psalm 17. Why did you choose this psalm?***

First, we decided to take that part from the Scripture because we finally want to get heard. So far the Catholic Church has been numb to the situation of gays and lesbians within the church. This homophobic tradition that has lasted for more than 2000 years, just like the degradation of women, must come to an end. The first important step towards reaching this goal is to start listening to us. A positive example of what this could mean has been shown recently by Bishop Bode who met with transgender people and listened to their life stories. It is decisive for providing successful pastoral care to accept people the way they are and to acknowledge fully the situation they live in.

Second, we opted for this psalm because we see the criminalization of homosexuality in many countries worldwide as an appalling act of injustice. In many countries that have been majorly influenced by Christianity and whose population is predominantly Catholic, homosexuality is a crime. We want the Pope makes a clear statement on this matter and that he pleads for justice. Proven by many positive examples in the past, the Catholic Church is an important player in the civil society, an agent that contributes massively to the collective forming of a political will in many countries around the world.

***Which examples of the criminalization of homosexuality worldwide do you criticize most? Where is the situation for gays and lesbians worst?***

In Malawi and Cameroon the conferences of Catholic bishops asked legislators in their countries to impose more draconian measures for homosexual acts. Similarly harsh punishments for homosexuality were introduced in Uganda and Nigeria with the massive backing of the Catholic Church.

In Slovakia the church offers seminars for gays and lesbians to be “cured”. What I particularly dislike in this context is the hypocrisy of many bishops who sing a different tune once they are outside of their home country.

***Looking at the level of acceptance of gays and lesbians, how would you evaluate their current situation in the church?***

Sadly, the official statement is still: “Homosexual acts are a sin.” However, we are in a period of transformation. While the papacy of Benedict XVI can truly be described as an ice age for the cause of lesbians and gays within the church, we see the current developments under Pope Frances as a thaw. This means that there are signs that hint at a change. However, there have been no specific acts or statements that would help gays and lesbians practically in their everyday lives.

The fact that Germany has introduced equal marriage for gays and lesbians will hopefully lead to a change in positions within the church as well.



***How do you deal with criticism expressed by fellow Christians? Do you understand why some of them are so hostile towards you and your efforts?***

I hardly come across open criticism. When people dislike me being gay or disapprove of my fight for gays and lesbians in the church, it is far more likely that I learn about this from others. I assume that people who strongly oppose homosexuality as a topic in general often have very personal reasons for doing so. In some cases it might be that they are afraid of their own sexuality. For others, it may have something to do with having internalized certain patterns of thought over time. I also believe that many are afraid of what might result from these changes, the threat of “a big chaos” looming ahead—the fear that their church might become Sodom and Gomorrah once homosexuality is officially tolerated.

***Which specific steps do you have in mind when you talk about building bridges, how do you want to achieve a mutual understanding?***

I would like people to see love as a universal phenomenon regardless of what this actually looks like in its manifestation and irrespective of people's gender. First and foremost, however, you have to ask yourself if it is worth trying to discuss these matters with someone. I have long given up on the hardliners. I check if the person I am talking to is generally open-minded and actually interested in the topic. If that is the case I try to build up trust with the other side by having very personal talks. At some point I start sharing stories from my life. Quoting passages from the Bible does not get you anywhere. Most lesbian and gay Christians have gone through very similar experiences of being fearful and being confronted with a wave of rejection. These stories are immensely moving since they reveal a lot about someone's life, what they have gone through. What is sad is that I know a lot of faithful Christians who have left the church saying this institution won't change. These people were led up the garden path by the policy of conservatives like Benedikt XVI. In reality, the church is far more dynamic and is constantly changing.

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***Twenty years from now what do you think the situation for gays and lesbians in the church will look like? What is your vision for the future?***

My vision for 2037? That the marriage of two women or two men has not only become a holy sacrament, but that it is possible to get the church's blessing for same-sex marriages. I hope the Catholic Church of the future openly supports and helps lesbians and gays who are seen as a normal part of religious life in many parishes worldwide. That might sound utopian to some, but this is already the case in some countries today.

***What makes you so optimistic?***

The fact that we already have teams of spiritual counselors for gays and lesbians in many German dioceses. Also in Austria, in the Netherlands, in Switzerland and in Great Britain huge progress has been made in the area of pastoral work. In the US changes in this respect have gained some momentum. However, these efforts face fierce opposition from the opposite side there. Still, step by step we currently see changes for the better in many places.

As a project manager of the German initiative "Ökumenische Arbeitsgruppe Homosexuelle und Kirche – HuK" (=ecumenical task force homosexuals and church) I fight for the equality of lesbians and gays in the Catholic Church. By setting up the Global Networks of Rainbow Catholics (GNRC) we are able to make the voices of gay and lesbian Catholics from around the world heard.

***If you were given the chance to address the world and everyone was able to listen to you, what would you say?***

To all the disappointed Catholics I would say that it is worth fighting persistently for changes within the institution. If we were able to alter the church's position on same-sex relationships, this would result in fundamental social changes in communities worldwide – changes that might be far more profound and deep in terms of people's mindsets than if these changes only occurred on a legal level.

The interviewer was Corinna Mayer.

(Translation: Lukas Hoffmann)

## Keep our Dreams come True

“Being homosexual and Catholic?” To many this seems to be a contradiction. Four courageous members of the international network of LGBT Catholics, the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics (GNRC), tell about the situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in their home countries Uganda, Slovakia, India and Chile.

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From the perspective of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, homosexuals acts are sins. Even though “Marriage for all” has been made possible in Germany, the Catholic Church sticks to its condemnation of homosexuality. Both in Germany and globally, LGBT people of faith suffer from struggle to reconcile their human love and their practiced religion. But even more: In many countries homosexuality is still prosecuted. And partially it is due to the fault of the Roman Catholic Church that punishment is increased. An official statement of the Pope against criminalisation of homosexuality could help to change this situation.

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### “Keep our dreams come true”

Alicia, Kampala, Uganda



My legal name is Ivan Damulira but I prefer calling myself Alicia Houston Nalunkuma because I am a transgender woman.

The situation for LGBT people is not only bad because of new laws that are being enforced on us. Even though we nullified some of these laws, they always come up with other laws that affect us and this puts us in danger. And many LGBT persons face a lot of Human Rights violations which include abuses that range from emotional, physical, psychological to economical difficulties. Many LGBT people face persistent media outings – violations which often result in unlawful evictions by their landlords. Many LGBT have been dismissed from their work places and others are denied jobs because of their gender identity and sexual orientation.

The first reason why I joined the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics was to share information and ideas to help our dreams come true and to dialogue with Catholic leaders. My goal is to have dialogues with the Catholic leaders of the church and even to campaign for Catholic statements against criminalisation of LGBT people so that LGBT persons in Uganda achieve equality.

It's important for me to be part of this assembly because I want to acquire skills on how other LGBT communities from different countries have been able to achieve their goals.

**“Non-conforming expressions are considered a threat.”**

Miro, Chynorany, Slovakia



My name is Miroslav Matavka, but my friends call me Miro. Currently, I am living in Munich, but I come from Slovakia. I am a gay Catholic. Slovak society is still struggling with general acceptance of homosexuality. The predominantly Catholic population relies heavily on the traditional conservative values of family, and non-conforming expressions are considered a threat.

For trans people the struggle of acceptance is even worse, as the notion of personal gender identification is considered unnatural and a grave sin. The Catholic Church is aggravating the personal struggles of LGBT people by providing with pastoral offerings that are aimed at overcoming supposed “homosexual tendencies” in a person. In these pastoral support groups LGBT people are led to refrain from sexual

acts and live chaste lives. Queer churches and gender studies are demonized as a bad influence of the West.

I joined the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics to learn from other rainbow/LGBT Catholics, how to live my life as a gay Catholic more fully. My goal is that together we will have a bigger voice and influence to push the local Catholic hierarchies and the Vatican towards support of the LGBT Catholics. It is important to me that the Catholic church fights against criminalisation and discrimination of persons simply because of their sexuality.

**“If you happen to be LGBT, have a faith and are from a culture that does not recognize the rights or existence of your being then it is almost impossible to find happiness or peace of mind.”**

Ruby, London, England



My name is Ruby Almeida. I am Indian, living in London. This cosmopolitan and LGBT friendly city does lend itself to living an open and authentic life for LGBT people of faith. Nonetheless, there are so many from our community who face discrimination on a daily basis from their immediate family circles and from their faith communities. Being gay is often tough enough but also being a person of faith makes for a life of incredible hurt and pain. And if you happen to be LGBT, have a faith and are from a culture that does not recognize the rights or existence of your being, then it is almost impossible to find happiness or peace of mind. And this is in London! Imagine how much more traumatic and impossible it is if you live in certain African or Asian countries where homosexuality is a crime. If your church condones the violence that you face on a daily basis, what hope is there for you? Yet this is the reality for so many

of our LGBT brothers and sisters in so many parts of the world.

Living in the West, I am acutely conscious of privileges that affords me to live out my life as authentically as I can. It also stokes up my conscience as a practicing Catholic to acknowledge that there are many things wrong with society and within our Church that so badly fail its LGBT faithful. Those challenges that prick the conscience just cannot be ignored if I call myself a follower of Christ. It is tragic to see how extremism of a right-wing fundamentalism has gripped our Church in so many countries. They can be put down to legacy of empire, which in many cases is absolutely true. However, when these thoughts and ideas permeate the daily lives of ordinary people because the ‘other’ voices are not heard then it is time to stand up and say it loud and with pride that this does not represent Jesus. Silence is not an option.

The Global Network of Rainbow Catholics offers us all a means to form solidarity and to enhance our support systems so that campaigns on criminalization and all forms of injustice can be publicized. GNRC is not meant to be a 'talking shop' but rather a mechanism for bringing about change in the hearts and minds of our church leaders.

My interest is in India, my home country. There is high hope that Section 377, another colonial legacy that made homosexuality illegal, will finally be chucked off the Statutes and LGBT people will be able to live rich and contented lives. However, the challenge for me is to find Catholic lights who will come out into the light and work with the hierarchy to address the genuine pain and suffering of its LGBT community. There are many bishops and cardinals too who are making all the right noises in support of lights. But it requires people to stand up and say that they are Catholic and LGBT and that they would like to work towards improving their LGBT community's lives. There is a real dearth of openly gay Indians who also have kept their faith.

We cannot change the world but we can work together to highlight injustices, to inform, educate, challenge and encourage our church leaders to address these wrongs within their own countries and dioceses.

**"Sometimes it takes a lot of my energy to deal with the fear of non-acceptation or discrimination."**

Fernando, Santiago, Chile



I am Fernando González. I'm a gay man, but I'm also a Catholic, a friend, a son, and I do consider myself a constructive member of society. My sexuality is part of me, not something to hide even sometimes it takes a lot of my energy to deal with the fear of non-acceptance or discrimination. My faith is also a constitutive part of me. It's part of my culture, family heritage and personal belief. I do believe that God loves me and created me just the way I am. Being gay is not a choice, but remaining on God's side and in the Church is one indeed.

While my country, Chile, is more open-minded than it used to be about sexual diversity, there are still places – such as the workplace or the church – where being gay, lesbian or bisexual is a risky situation. Twenty years ago, it was unthinkable for someone to be open about his or her homosexuality, including with family or friends. Our society started to discuss homosexuality when some acts of violence, motivated by homophobia, were publicized by the mass media. People began to question their fears and stereotypes and how these attitudes could turn into expressions of violence towards a relative, friend, neighbor or colleague. Similarly the State assumed its political responsibility and decriminalized homosexuality in 1999, and later recognized discrimination based homophobia as a legal transgression in 2012. We passed the civil union act in 2014, but still there are many open discussions, especially about equal marriage and gender identity.

In 2015 my Chilean LGBTI pastoral care group, Padis+, designated me to assist the first GNRC Assembly in Rome. There I met many LGBTI Catholics from all over the world who made me realize that we, in Chile, were not alone in our task of pastoral care for LGBTI and their families. They encouraged me to share a common vision of full inclusion and justice for LGBTI people in the Catholic church. I want to connect Catholic LGBTI communities worldwide. There is so much experience and knowledge about LGBTI pastoral care and it needs to be catalogued and consolidated. We can help each other on many levels of support. We can aid those who are just starting a pastoral care community focused on sexual diversity. The other goal is to create a reliable and trustworthy platform to unify the LGBTI Catholic voice with the Vatican. We empower ourselves when we work together.

The editor was Corinna Mayer

(Translation: Lukas Hoffmann)

## Constitution and Internal Regulations

More than 30 LGBTI Catholic and Christian groups gathered and officially joined the GNRC by signing the Constitutive Act as founder members.

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We hope more groups will join our Network and keep working for the affirmation, inclusion, dignity and equality of LGBTIQ Catholics in the Roman Catholic Church and in society. For more details about the representatives and groups that signed the Constitutive Act of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics just download the official document.

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### GNRC Constitutive Act

[English](#) / [Español](#) / [Italiano](#)

The GNRC Constitution and Internal Regulations are the most important documents for the GNRC as an organization. Based on your responses, suggestions and the consensus agreed in our Second Assembly, these documents were approved on December 2nd, 2017.



The Constitution and Internal Regulations documents are now officially registered under Italian law as of December 17th 2017.

### GNRC Constitution

[English](#) / [Italian](#) / [Spanish](#)

### GNRC Internal Regulations

[English](#) / [Spanish](#)

Our appreciations to the Organizational Development Committee (Chris Vella, Benjamin Oh, Eros Shawn, Fabio Regis & Michael Brinkschroeder) for its commitment during the past two years and the development of the first draft of the mentioned documents.



## GNRC Board

A new GNRC Board was elected for the period 2018 – 2019

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The GNRC Board replaced the previous Steering Committee and is composed of regional, sexual orientation or gender identity representatives to provide a wide perspective and diversity to our Network management. The new Board chosen from the 32 groups of LGBTIQ Catholics, their families and friends were elected during the GNRC second Assembly on December 2017. Later, the Board through internal elections chose interim management roles. This was to enable the immediate signing of the GNRC Constitution which had to be filed for registration in Italy. Permanent elected roles on the GNRC Board for the period of 2018 – 2019 will be held in March.

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### Co-Chairs:



**Ruby Almeida** ([Quest](#), UK) is from India and was a Media Lecturer and worked at London Metropolitan University and West Thames College and is now a Freelance Trainer, and Chair of UK Catholic LGBTI group Quest. She is also part of the Gender Diversity representatives at the GNRC Board.



**Christopher Vella** ([Drachma LGBT](#), Malta) is a lecturer in History at the University of Malta Junior College. He is the Coordinator of Drachma LGBTI and a Board member of the European Network of Parents of LGBTI+ Persons. He is also the European representative at the GNRC Board.

**Regional Representatives (others):** Benjamin Oh for Asia Pacific ([Acceptance](#), Australia), Brizan Okollan for Africa (Upperrift Minorities, Kenia), Fernando González for South America and the Caribbean ([Padis+](#), Chile), and Francis De Bernardo for North America (New Ways Ministry, USA).

**Gender Diversity Representatives (others):** Joseanne Peregín ([Drachma Parents Group](#), Malta) and Joanita Warry Ssenfuka (FARUG, Uganda).

**Legal Representative:** Andrea Rubera ([Cammini di Speranza](#), Italy).

Our Co-chairs Christopher Vella and Ruby Almeida have written an inspiring letter to our Community for the continuity of the tasks discussed during the regional pre-conferences and working groups in Dachau



## Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

from the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics

*To extend his dominion in boundless peace, over the throne of David and over his kingdom to make it secure and sustain it in fair judgement and integrity. (Isaiah 9, 7)*

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December 24, 2017

To all our dear family of friends in Christ,

Both Ruby and Chris, as your co-Chairs write to wish you a heartfelt Christmas greeting. We hope that the euphoria of the Assembly at Dachau carried all of you home safely to your loved ones.

The magic that happened at our Assembly was all thanks to the amazing work of our committed and hard working Steering Committee as well as our wonderful hosts at [HuK](#) and [Queergottesdienst München](#). All of this was totally worth it with the culmination of the Constitution being adopted and witnessed with the signatures of our now founding member organisations of GNRC. And so, now the real work begins with the newly elected GNRC Board. There is so much that needs to be done with immediate effect even whilst we bask in the glorious joy of our Assembly.

We are thinking in particular on the important conclusions we reached together in the Assembly in Munich. As you know, from the 17th December, we became an officially registered organisation with the Italian authorities. This does not mean that our capacity building as GNRC is complete.

The Constitution and the Internal Regulations now provide us with the essential basics of our organisation, but the GNRC needs to continue developing and expanding into an organisation that is more financially independent and more effective in reaching out to LGBTIQ Catholic and Christian groups around the world. We need to work at becoming an effective prophetic voice, speaking against discrimination and criminalization within society and the Church. We must foster dialogue to help counter the gross ignorance related to issues on gender, sexuality and family life. We need to become a repository for resources and a community of faith where LGBTIQ spirituality can flourish in its own right. Finally, we need to become a more inclusive organisation. We are aware that only 19 women and 1 transgender woman attended the second Assembly. It would be so great if in two years time, the gender balance would be more representative of our diversity as a Network!

The African region presented a heartfelt statement at the Assembly. We want to assure you that the Board is not intending to sleep on the hopes and dreams of the African Rainbow Catholics. We make your cry our own and will explore all possibilities to procure ensure that your message gets to where it is most needed most to be heard!

We would like all the regional groups to meet and discuss how they will build on the discussions and strategies that were created in your workshops at the Assembly. The Board would like to hear from you on a regular basis. We would like to know about issues that are important in your region. We would like to know of any initiatives that your regional groups have created. We would like to hear about any good news or difficult challenges that you face on a political level or from your Church leaders.

Most importantly, we also need you! We need your skills and expertise in so many areas. If you have media skills, IT skills, journalism skills, accounting skills, language translation skills then please share them with the Board. In this same letter, you will find a [link to an online document](#) where you can volunteer your skills in the various working-groups and tasks of the GNRC. We urge you to help us continue developing our Network's capacities and further our aims. Lastly, we need those amazing photos you took that can be shared within GNRC ([media@gnrcatholics.org](mailto:media@gnrcatholics.org)). And those who were there for the pre-conferences, we need any footage you took of your groups at work. We want to build up an archive of material of our incredible, never to be repeated and historic meeting at Dachau. Let's continue as we began by working together for a great future for our GNRC family.

Wishing you a truly blessed and joyous Christmas

**Chris Vella and Ruby Almeida, GNRC Co-Chairs**

## Second Assembly Opening Greetings

By Ruby Almeida, GNRC Board Co-chair (2018 – 2019)

[Chinese](#) / [English](#) / [Español](#) / [Française](#) / [German](#) / [Italiano](#) / [Portuguese](#)

Dear Friends and Colleagues, it is my absolute and honour to be here with you and to have represented you for the past two years as Co-Chair along with Michael Brinkschroeder.



Firstly, I want to welcome all of you to our 2nd Assembly here in Munich. I see many dear friends who were at our first Assembly in Rome. Please put your hands up so that we can see all of you. And I also see many new faces who I know will become part of the GNRC family. Again, please put your hands up if this is your first time here. I know that you may come here as strangers but you will not leave without becoming an extended member of the GNRC family. Your Christmas list of cards has just grown huge!

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Little did I know that when I went to Rome that I would become part of this incredible journey of faith and hope to create a vision and a tangible future for our LGBTI friends around the world. If you have not yet seen the report that the Steering Committee have made, and you will for sure, let me assure you that the Steering Committee have spent so many hours and days meeting, discussing planning to make GNRC into a legal entity. Everything that we have done has been to get us to where we are today. Many of us have become 'widows' to our partners, perhaps with them wondering if we were actually having an affair with that person on Skype! Well I guess that we have all been having an affair of some sorts. How else could we have been so passionate and dedicated to realising the birth of our fledgling baby that is GNRC. We look forward to its first tentative steps into the world and watch its growth as it becomes a powerful and vocal advocate for all its members around the world. The success of GNRC cannot happen if we do not have active participation from the membership not just at Assembly and on the Board but during the intervening years through regional meetings and consultations. We are here to represent you and your group and your region. So stay with us and work with us.

Lastly, I want to thank the Steering Committee for all their hard work. So please stand up Joseanne. Chris. Fernando. Ben. Eros. Frank. To late addition Pilot. Oh, and myself! And lastly and most importantly to Michael whose endless energy and patience guided the GNRC ship safely here.

Have an enjoyable Assembly and I look forward to getting to know all of you. Thank you.

## Second Assembly Opening Speech

### Church Can Change: Catholics for LGBT Equality

By Michael Brinkschröder at the 2nd Assembly of the GNRC. November 30th 2017 in Dachau (Germany).

[Chinese](#) / [English](#) / [Español](#) / [Française](#) / [German](#) / [Italiano](#) / [Portuguese](#)

Dear siblings from all over the world,



We just met Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who is often called the first gay activist of world history. 150 years ago, he has held a remarkable speech in Munich. In 1867, he called the national conference of German lawyers to stop the criminalisation of men who are loving men. But his plea for this just cause wasn't heard! The majority became furious and shouted him down. During his life, he wrote many texts in which he presented his view on men who love other men. He gave them the name "Urninge" as the term "homosexual" was not yet invented, but something new appeared in history. The longer he did research about Urninge, he realized that there are not only men and women who love the same-sex, but also people with other kinds of gender identities. And he also gave them specific names. He was quite

clear that the human rights must also be applied to these kind of persons. And even same-sex marriage was already on the list of his political and theological ideas and demands.

In the last few months three remarkable things for LGBTIQ people have happened in Germany, three achievements which finally bring to a happy end what Karl Heinrich Ulrichs had called for, three just causes that were finally heard.

1. To our big surprise, chancellor Merkel has opened the door for a decision of the parliament on same-sex marriage based on individual conscience. So far, she had blocked such a decision throughout the 12 years of being our chancellor. Immediately, the Social Democrats used this opportunity, putting forward a bill that was already in the formal process of deliberation. With a clear majority the Bundestag voted in favour of "marriage for all", as we called it, in the last session of its election period. All of a sudden, we had achieved this symbol of full legal equality of lesbians and gays in our country. For many of us this was an incredible moment of joy. We finally saw come true what we had dreamed of and fought for so many years.
2. The Bundestag also passed a bill that declares the sentences against gay men that were based on the §175, the anti-homosexuality law, as invalid and unjust. The punishment for same-sex acts between men had been increased by the Nazi-Regime to several years of imprisonment. This law remained in force in the Federal Republic of Germany until 1969. During these years even more gay men were sent to prison than during the Nazi time. Those who are still alive are now rehabilitated and get a re-compensation for the years they were imprisoned. For the first time in our history, a law that was approved by a democratic political and juridical system was retrospectively declared wrong and unjust.
3. Only two weeks ago the Constitutional Court has decided that the next government must come up with a law that allows for a third option for the categorization of "Geschlecht" (sex/gender). This may be called "inter" or "diverse" or otherwise. It is not enough to allow that the gender classification can remain blank. This case recognizes that intersex people may have a gender identity that is neither male nor female, but still a positive gender identity. This judgement can be perceived as a revolution, because it declares that the personality rights of an individual person are more important than the binary system of sexes and gender identities.

To our big surprise, this judgment was welcomed by the speaker of the German Catholic Bishops' Conference and by two academic Catholic theologians who estimated it as sign of respect for the individual personality of intersex persons.



Let me now tell you a little bit more in depth what has happened in Germany in the last couple of years in our relationship as LGBTI Catholics to the Roman Catholic Church.

Already in 2011 we had a sense that something new was happening in the Catholic Church. Several Cardinals and bishops made new types of statements, e.g. about the necessity to include gays and lesbians in the parishes or that they appreciated love and care as positive values that were also realized in many same-sex partnerships.

26 years of papacy of John Paul II and Benedict XVI had not left over many gay and lesbian activists who still had hope that changing the Catholic Church is possible. So the few remaining gay Catholic activists in my association "Homosexuals and Church" started thinking about new ways of organizing. We founded the Catholic LGBT Committee, an informal network of eight Catholic and ecumenical Christian LGBT groups. Besides Homosexuals and Church this includes the Network of Catholic Lesbians, the Study Group Gay Theology, the Catholic Gay Priests Groups and the LGBT Caucus of the Youth Organization Catholic Young Community as nationwide organizations as well as 3 local groups in Magdeburg, Frankfurt and Munich. This Catholic LGBT Committee has become the central platform for LGBT church politics in Germany.

Homosexuals and Church started as well the project "Catholics for LGBT Equality", funded by Open Society Initiative for Europe, for which I work as part-time project manager.

In 2012, we started dialogue with the Board of the Central Committee of German Catholics, an umbrella organization which represents more than 20 million of lay Catholics in our country. This was followed by meetings and co-operations with some of their member organisations like the Catholic Youth Federation, the Catholic Women's organizations and the Catholic Workers Movement. These contacts turned out to be quite supportive. Not only that they gave us space in the official program of the Katholikentag, the biannual church fair in Germany, they also demanded blessing ceremonies for same-sex couples from our bishops.

We also had meetings with the bishops from Berlin, Trier and again Berlin as well as with high rank church officials in other dioceses. In the beginning of 2013, we started a series of regular annual meetings with Bishop Franz-Josef Bode, the chair of the Pastoral Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference and bishop of Osnabrück, my home diocese. In him we found an open-minded person, willing to listen and already prepared to talk to lesbian and gay people from his time as chair of the Youth Commission.

During our annual meetings with him and usually three of his staff members, we focused on one topic per year.

**2013:** the improvement of the ecclesial labour law for lesbian and gay employees of the Church

**2014:** the place of gays and lesbians in theological anthropology or: How to overcome the idea of natural law?

**2015:** the opportunities of the Family Synod for LGBT people and our families

**2016:** the chances to institutionalize blessing ceremonies for same-sex partnerships

**2017:** pastoral care for transgender people.

We try to give these meetings a specific structure: At first, one or two people tell their personal story which is related to the main topic of the meeting. Sometimes this is followed by a theological or conceptual input from our side. Then there is time for discussion which is usually a common exercise to search for ways to connect principles of the Catholic tradition with the topic, but also to critically assess of what could be a possible way forward and what would cause too

much resistance or is justified too weakly. Towards the end of the meeting we usually come up with a concrete proposal for a practical step forward, e.g. an in-depth training for pastoral workers and counsellors on pastoral care with transgender people.

This regular dialogue has already brought some fruits. But I want to admit, that in most cases we were not the only group in the church that had pointed into the same direction.



In terms of ecclesial labour law we now have the situation that entering a civil union is no longer considered as a reason for the church to fire an employee. However, this is only valid for nurses, doctors and others, but not for those of us who give instructions about faith, e.g. as pastoral workers in the parish or as teachers of religious education.

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During the Family Synod 2015, it was the German speaking circle that proposed an amendment about the relationship of sex and gender. It made its way into the final document of the Synod which for the first time ever included a positive statement about gender in an official church document. In the midst of the currently dominant stream of Catholic anti-gender hysteria, this can be regarded as a major breakthrough towards a recognition of the diversity of gender identities in the future. This amendment was accompanied by the publication of the leaflet "Gender sensitive" which contains a positive Catholic understanding of gender mainstreaming, same-sex relationships, intersex conditions and queer saints. Academic Catholic theologians from Germany have taken up the issue with enormous intensity. Only in 2017, they have published three books on gender which are affirming the use of this concept in theology.

At the end of the Synod, three German bishops publicly asked women and homosexual people for apologies that they had given priority to dogmatic ways of thinking over pastoral concerns in the past. It is not yet clear which consequences need to be drawn from this apology, but nevertheless it is an important sign of a reversal.

Another important fruit of the Family Synod and Pope Francis' "Amoris laetitia" is a new wave of establishing professional teams and staff workers who have the official task to do pastoral care for and together with LGBTIQ people. While some dioceses like Hildesheim, Osnabrück, Limburg and Freiburg as well as our colleagues in Austria (in Linz and Innsbruck) are doing this already for many years, we can clearly perceive that more and more dioceses are currently in the process to follow this path – among them is also the archdiocese of Munich-Freising. In order to inspire this process, we have developed a concept paper on Rainbow Pastoral Work to make sure that the needs of lesbian, bisexual, trans and intersex people are considered from the very beginning. It also reflects on the contradictions between this new pastoral approach and the "old", but still existing moral theology that condemns homosexual acts and regards homosexual people as morally somehow dubious.

I am sure that the working group on pastoral care will bring together many more examples for this new wave from all over the world, e.g. Switzerland, UK, Australia as well as the many pastoral initiatives inspired by Jesuits in recent years in Chile, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa and surely in other countries as well.

Good things need their time to ripe until they bear fruit. And we had to learn that there are issues like partnership blessing ceremonies that can't be solved within the short period of a few years only. They need more time to ripe. Nevertheless, we are quite optimistic to see more progress related to blessing ceremonies for same-sex couples.

This year, we have celebrated the 500 anniversary of the reformation through Martin Luther. For the first time in history, this important jubilee was celebrated in ecumenical friendship. As LGBTIQ Christians, most of our groups are ecumenical or are working in ecumenical partnership. Almost all of the Protestant regional churches have institutionalized blessing ceremonies for same-sex couples. Four of them have even achieved full equality with heterosexual marriages. I think that they are good role models for the Catholic Church in Germany and their progress contributes significantly to the expectation that churches can change.

## Preach: Hear a Just Cause

Delivered by Susanne Andrea Birke on 2nd of December 2017, during the 2nd Assembly of GNRC, Bürgersaalkirche Munich.

[Chinese](#) / [English](#) / [Español](#) / [Française](#) / [German](#) / [Italiano](#) / [Portuguese](#)



Hear a just cause. I believe, we all know, what it means not to be heard. Asking to be heard over and over again and not getting any reaction, sometimes not even a chance to talk to those in power personally has been my experience with the upper hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church more than once. I joined a group (mainly women) on the last day of their pilgrimage from St. Gallen to Rome to hand over a plea that no more decision will be made about women without women. There was not even one Vatican official to meet the over 400 women and men. The three bishops and the abbot, who celebrated Eucharist with us, could not change that either. I experienced the same on a local level – the bishop of my home diocese, the diocese of Chur, sees no need to meet representatives of rainbow Christians.

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The silence on the criminalization of same-sex love and sexuality and the horrible violence against the rainbow community around the world feels even worse. It is breaking my heart over and over again, when I think of those dear to me having to live endangered lives day by day. This silence is cruel and sinful to me. And believe me – sin is a word I as a theologian and pastoral worker hardly ever use.

So then I was pondering this situation of disregard, the story of the nameless greek woman came to my mind. This is the only story, when Jesus had to be convinced to help. Her plea was at first disregarded by him. She asked him to heal her daughter, while Jesus had tried to get away from the crowd, which constantly followed him. He treated her harshly and even insulted her, comparing her and her daughter to dogs. She does not back down, instead she turns his argument against him and wins him over. Not only changing her daughter's fate by this, but making him look beyond his set limits too. Here we watch a woman fighting successfully for inclusion and equal treatment for her daughter. We see a Jesus being willing to change his mind because of one woman's plea.

If Jesus himself did change his mind to include someone he disregarded at first, I see no reason, why the church should not be able to do so too. We will keep reminding our church and go on demanding inclusion for all of us. We have been promised a life in fullness too. Our church needs to stand up for us and make sure each and every one of us is safe and does not have to fear for his, her, their life or safety. As friend and ex-partner of someone born in Jamaica I definitely cannot be silent.

Living with her through the fears in her country of origin, then watching her having to leave, already made me sad and angry. Seeing now, that she still is not safe in the US is no better. Hearing, how she is being exploited and abused at work, leaves me feeling helpless, sad and angry once again.

In all this finding community is vital. I love the way rainbow communities celebrate life and love in the midst of violence and humiliation – not denying the pain, but not forgetting about the gifts we have been given either. We are here together working, celebrating, praying, discussing, sharing joys and worries, and having fun in a rather safe place. At times even listening each other into speech. We strengthen each other by our presence, give new hope. We can feel that the promise of advent is becoming real. The Living One is right in our midst. In this way we are church, following the teaching of Jesus, while still waiting for the promise of advent to become real for us in the Roman Catholic Church as a whole.



But sometimes we do challenge each other too. This is not only about the Roman Catholic hierarchy having to listen to a just cause. Though we share a lot, we do not all face the same difficulties. We have to listen to just causes in our own community. This can be painful, but it is important. While standing up for myself against the discriminations I experienced, I also learned a lot from people around me, who asked me to listen to their cause. My ex-partner and friend let me see the world through different eyes. I went through experiences of powerlessness I had not made before. Not being able to stop racist discrimination and arbitrariness by the German border police, was one. Moments like these gave me an idea what she was going through day by day.

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Sometimes I was thinking this really is too much to bear. At the same time I was very conscious, that while I was able to make a choice on this, my ex-partner never could. She had to face it all, no matter how she felt about it.

It was also her talking to me on these issues, which helped me see more. Though we usually might identify more with the woman having to argue with Jesus, we sometimes will find ourselves in the role of the disciples trying to get rid of her. Or we might find ourselves in the role of a rather unwilling Jesus not wanting to listen to a plea, which he did not see as his business. Sometimes we might just be tired from all the things needing to be done, wanting nothing but a break. Sometimes we might think, why should I care, this is not the problem we are supposed to be dealing with, this is not important. But if we want to build a community of support we have to take into account that some are more vulnerable than others. Trans women of colour are living in even greater danger than white trans women do. Sexual harassment or living as a migrant might not look like a subject having to be addressed by a network dealing with LGBTIQ+ issues. But these might be just causes we have to listen to and deal with.

I am deeply grateful for all the work done by all of us trying to make a way together. Grateful for all the allies and support we found. Grateful that we can come together hearing and speaking out, paving a new way to help God's promised reign come true.

So let us hear once again, what Paul wrote in the year 54 to the community in Corinth. In his letter Paul talks about this community and the people in it being holy, because together they form the body of Christ. These words are also meant for us. For us, who are here together now, during this service, the assembly of the GNCR and the communities we come from:

*"I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way – with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge – God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed."*



## Almost 100 LGBTIQ Catholics from 35 countries gathered in Munich-Dachau

Results of the 2nd Assembly of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics "Hear a Just Cause" (Psalm 17,1)

[English](#) / [Español](#) / [Français](#) / [German](#) / [Portuguese](#)

December 4, 2017. "Homosexual acts are sins" – at least according to the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. Meanwhile, the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics (GNRC) works for justice and acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer persons in the Catholic Church. Under the biblical motto "Hear a Just Cause" (Psalm 17,1), almost 100 Rainbow Catholics from 35 countries gathered in Munich-Dachau from November 30th to December 3rd, 2017, in order to develop a common agenda for the future.

The weekend was worth it! On Saturday, December 2nd, the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics was officially founded as an association. The seat of the association is – of course! – in Rome, because here more than anywhere else it is necessary to win the ear of Church-leaders.

A special focus of the assembly was laid on the African region, alongside other parallel meetings for the Latin-American and Asia-Pacific regions, because everyday life of LGBTIQ people in many African countries is in danger. During the assembly, the African Network of Rainbow Catholics tabled a motion urging the GNRC to make their voice be heard at the Vatican: "We call upon the General Assembly of the GNRC to request the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church to speak for inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer, (LGBTIQ) people in the Church."

We are deeply concerned that over 70 countries in the world criminalize same-sex sexual conduct between consenting adults, with the majority of these countries in Africa. Consensual same sex conduct is punishable by death in Nigeria, Mauritania, Sudan and some parts of Somalia. Criminal laws of this kind, whether or not enforced, contribute to persecutory environments and fuel violence against LGBTIQ people. The violence meted out on LGBTIQ individuals ranges from general violence (such as assault) to the most brutal killings (murder). "We urge the Church hierarchy to commit to teach, preach and act against any laws that undermine human dignity and oppress any and all minorities, including LGBTIQ people.", says the African Network. The motion was accepted by the Assembly of the GNRC. The work begins immediately.

Responsible for the coordination of the upcoming activities is the new elected GNRC Board. Its members are coming from all over the world:

**Joanita Warry Ssenfuka** (35), Freedom and Roam Uganda (Uganda) / **Brizan Ogollan** (34), Upper Rift Minorites (Kenya)

**Benjamin Oh** (36), Acceptance Sydney (Australia) / **Joseanne Peregin** (56), Drachma Parents Group (Malta)

**Christopher Vella** (39), Drachma LGBT (Malta) / **Ruby Almeida** (61), Quest (UK / India)

**Francis DeBernardo** (58), New Ways Ministry (USA) / **Andrea Rubera** (52), Cammini di Speranza (Italy)

**Fernando González** (37), Padis+ (Chile)

The GNRC Co-Chairs are Ruby Almeida and Christopher Vella.

Among the 89 participants of the Assembly were only 19 women and 1 transgender woman present. A stronger representation of women and transgender persons is an important wish of the GNRC for the future.

### THE GNRC BOARD

## Second Assembly Statistics

*Chinese / [English](#) / [Español](#) / [Française](#) / [German](#) / [Italiano](#) / [Portuguese](#)*

Almost 90 people gathered in Munich-Dachau. We hope that they represent the diversity of our Network but also they sign as that we have major tasks till our third Assembly. Pendant is the incorporation of more women, transgender people and obviously those groups or countries that could not be present or are waiting for us to get in contact with them. What do you think? Do you notice another trend among this numbers and rates?

Groups	1st Assembly	2nd Assembly
Catholics	20	27
Christian E	8	11
Human Rights	5	7

Sexual Orientation	1st Assembly	2nd Assembly
Lesbian	17	16
Gay	39	60
Bisexual	4	5
Transgender	1	1
Straight	8	7

Gender Identity	1st Assembly	2nd Assembly
Male	49	69
Female	19	19
Non Bin	1	1

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Total	33	45
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Total	69	89
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Total	69	89
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Countries	1st Assembly	2nd Assembly
Africa	4	7
Asia Pacific	4	4
Europe	11	14
Northamerica	1	1
Southamerica	3	6

Assistants	1st Assembly	2nd Assembly
Africa	4	10
Asia Pacific	6	8
Europe	46	51
Northamerica	7	5
Southamerica	6	15

Languages	1st Assembly	2nd Assembly
English	22	21
French	1	2
Italian	13	4
Spanish	8	17
Chinese	1	2
German	6	16
Portuguese	3	5
Others	15	22

Total	23	32
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Total	69	89
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Total	69	89
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### A word of thanks and appreciation

Let us express our gratitude to the Open Society Initiative for Europe who financially has supported the project "Catholics for LGBT Equality" and also our conference.

The Arcus Foundation also deserve a big thank as the main sponsor of our Assembly. Without them and the support from Randall Miller it would not have been possible to realize it. Unfortunately, he had to cancel his participation but sends his warm greetings.

Another donor who deserves our thanks for a financial contribution is the Archdiocese of Munich-Freising. Each time we walked into the plenary room we have read the sign "sponsored by the Catholic church".

This GNRC Assembly got also support from the Global Interfaith Network for People of all Sexes, Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions (in short: GIN-SSOGIE) which was represented among us by their Board member Tania Irias from Nicaragua.

Two participants received a scholarship from the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs which was also helpful in many cases of visa applications.

The journalist Corinna Mayer, who aided us during the Assembly with Media and PR support.

And finally, we want to thank again the Ecumenical Working Group Homosexuals and Church as well as the Queergottesdienst Munich who both held several collections for supporting participants from Eastern and Southern Europe.

GLOBAL NETWORK OF RAINBOW CATHOLICS 2018 ®

Website: [www.rainbowcatholics.org](http://www.rainbowcatholics.org)

Mail: [media@gnrcatholics.org](mailto:media@gnrcatholics.org)

Twitter: [GNRCatholics](#)

Facebook: [GlobalNetworkofRainbowCatholics](#)

*The Global Network of Rainbow Catholics (GNRC) brings together organizations and individuals who work for pastoral care and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people and their families. We work for the affirmation, inclusion, dignity and equality of our rainbow community in the Roman Catholic Church and in society. The GNRC was founded in Rome in October 2015, and ratified and adopted the Constitution and Internal Regulations in Munich- Dachau in December 2017. GNRC was officially registered in Italy as an international Third Sector organization on the 17 December 2017.*