

Catholic Sexual Conversations in a Diverse Church Launch Global Network of Rainbow Catholics Theological Committee 25 June 2021

It's a huge pleasure to gather for this launch, not so much as a "talking at", but rather as another step in "doing LGBT+ theology together".

The Global Network of Rainbow Catholics Theological Committee aims to serve GNRC members and its Board by undertaking theological reflection on the realities of LGBT+ lives and our faith, so contributing to the development of theological understanding in the realms of sexuality and gender identities. This involves identifying those concrete experiences from within our journeying as people of God that strongly exemplify our integration of gender, sexuality, and faith. One area where this is clearly apparent and which points to new and creative understandings of ourselves as beloved rainbow people is in the growth of LGBT+ rituals and liturgies, some explicitly religious, others signalling a commonality with secular values.

One of our first steps was to gather together examples of such celebrations which would also express the cultural and global diversity of LGBT+ Catholics, and to assemble these as an on-line resource for GNRC members. This we have begun to do with a rich collection of texts from across continents, including celebrations of same-sex marriages, partnership blessings, baptisms, namings, and other significant events within our personal lives and those of our communities. If we were also to undertake some theological reflection upon the significance of these sources, then a framework for future discourse was needed.

At the same time, we were frustrated by so much activity within LGBT+ other theological circles which continued to focus on challenging the polemics of doctrinal statements promoted by hierarchical and institutional bodies within the Roman Catholic Church, rather than working from LGBT+ Catholics' liberating praxis, spirituality, and theology towards a new vision. Key to our growing understanding was to acknowledge that LGBT+ faith-seeking-understanding is a process of listening and walking together, a developmental and evolutionary journey, rather than drawing up yet another fixed-in-time document.

Historical, biblical research and on-going studies are crucial keys to our growing visions of LGBT+ Catholic theologies, as are the insights of anthropology along with the human and social sciences. However, our theological endeavour should not remain locked in spaces of the past, but rather be always open to the dynamic relationship of LGBT+ human and social experience engaging with the inspiration of divine wisdom gifted to us in baptismal Spirit, for she blows where she will.

The process we are launching through this statement, ***Catholic Sexual Conversations in a Diverse Church***, is therefore intended to invite LGBT+ Catholics and others in the people of God, including those who serve in official teaching and preaching roles in the Church, to move from analysing or debating specific magisterial texts to asking *'What gifts do LGBTIQ+ persons bring to the world and the Church?'* and *'What is the Holy Spirit telling the Catholic community through the stories of LGBTIQ+ people?'* I would also want to add parents and families.

We further invite the in-Spirited body of all God's people, to 'receive' our reflections not in a traditionally understood, passive mode but actively 'owning' them as a contribution to the 'sensus fidelium' on these issues. Active 'reception' and 'ownership' then become clear hallmarks of what it is to be a synodal Christian in a Church whose starting place for mission and ministry is at the peripheries, where the Good News is discovered at, and preached to, 'the ends of the earth'.

This proposed stance echoes some of the proposals made in the 2014 & 2015 Synods on Marriage & Family Life, as well as Pope Francis' *The Joy of Love*, and frees us from being dominated by documents emanating from different Roman congregations. These hold only a very relative and time-bound status within the Church's deposit of teachings. Our endeavour is to move beyond adversarial conflicts in the theological realm and associated culture-wars to a relational way of doing theology which brings us, despite diverse opinions, to position LGBT+ theological reflections in the context of a one, holy, catholic, apostolic, and synodal Church, listening, repenting, walking, celebrating, grieving, but always reflecting together.

Martin Pendergast STL, MA, MSW