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“For everything created by God is good,
and nothing is to be rejected”

Queer & Catholic Journeys

1. Introduction

The European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups (EF) is an association of 47 member groups from 21 countries in Europe representing approximately 6.000 members. The Roman Catholic Working Group of the EF has 20 members from 12 countries. The groups represented are: La Communauté du Christ Libérateur (Belgium), Ökumenische Arbeitsgruppe Homosexuelle und Kirche (HuK) e.V. (Germany), David et Jonathan (France), Cammini di Speranza (Italy), Drachma (Malta), Werkgroep van Katholieke Homo-Pastores (Netherlands), Wiara i Tęcza (Poland), Sopro (Portugal), Nuntiare et Recreare (Russia), Signum - Dúhovní kresťania (Slovakia), Christian Organisation of Lesbians (Switzerland), Crismhom (Spain), Quest and LGBT+ Catholics Westminster Pastoral Council (UK).

The Synodal Process has stimulated an intense exchange about the diversity of our experiences as LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer and non-binary) Catholics in our parishes, dioceses and countries.

We started our own process in September 2021 with an extraordinary video conference in which we analysed the opportunities for us as LGBTIQ+ Catholics and reflected on the widely held scepticism stemming from multiple forms of exclusion in the past. Despite past exclusions (marginalisation) we encouraged the member groups of the EF to participate actively in the Global Synodal Process. During our bi-monthly online meetings we monitored the local experiences of our member groups in their parishes and dioceses as well as the inspirations coming from the Synodal Path in Germany. The discussion process culminated in a face-to-face workshop with 20 participants at the annual conference of the EF in Switzerland in May 2022 which summarised the inputs from the member groups represented. Based on this gathered information and other submissions to the Synodal Process from Catholic LGBTIQ+ groups, we present this statement.

2. Community

a) Visibility & Strength

A constant voice in Synodal Submissions, particularly in Western Europe, laments the exclusion and sidelining of LGBTIQ+ Catholics. While it is clear, that the inclusion and welcome of LGBTIQ+ Catholics, parents and families is a major desire of grass-roots Church communities, and diverse pastoral strategies had been developed such as “welcoming Masses”, “Rainbow Pastoral” and other types of support, LGBTIQ+ Catholics were often “rendered invisible” beyond these occasions. Several submissions note the invisibility of lesbian women’s experience in institutional Church responses, and the denigration of trans-persons and their allies as promoters of a falsely named “gender ideology”.

The baptismal, gender, and sexual identities of LGBTIQ+ Catholics are experienced as fundamental aspects of human identity and membership of the People of God and the Body of Christ. In all the circumstances and situations of life, God calls each person, whatever their gender or sexual orientation, to fulfil that part of God’s creation as a co-creator which only that person can fulfil. In many of the Church’s processes, structures, and ministries, ordained or lay, this is routinely denied and therefore constitutes forms of structural sin against LGBTIQ+ Catholics, including their children.

In many places the pastoral and theological response to LGBTIQ+ Catholics is characterised by a perception that we are victims, carrying a cross of woundedness, for whom the Church’s institutions can bring compassion and healing. As was noted by a number of bishops and others in the 2014 & 2015 Synods on Marriage & Family, such an attitude denies the gifts and strengths which we bring to the whole People of God as justice-seeking disciples. This attitude also does not take into consideration that the “cross of woundedness” is in many cases being put on our shoulders by Church institutions and the language of doctrinal statements.

b) Safety & Vulnerability

Open / transparent dialogue is an urgent need in our church. All [of us] have been baptised and through Baptism become part of the Easter mission given by Christ. All of our voices are needed to fulfil this mission. We are grateful for the steps taken in this direction, but we do wonder if persons in leading positions are conscious of how far we are from seeing this actualised when it comes to the LGBTIQ+ persons that Christ calls. In some countries it is not safe to come out. Many countries around the world still have drastic laws forcing LGBTIQ+ people into hiding. How are these people supposed to become part of a synodal process? Even in countries with a rather advanced legislation on behalf of human rights of LGBTIQ+ persons the Roman Catholic Church is not a safe place to come out for many, especially for those working for and in the church. How do these conditions allow us to achieve the visibility we need to enter into true synodal dialogue? Those who make themselves vulnerable can experience a lot of support, especially at the grassroots level, but they may also have to deal with hate and some fear for their physical safety. We hope that the courage of those coming out - especially in places where it is not safe to do so will be adequately honoured by those receiving their statements.

There can be safe places or safe individuals to talk to in the Church, but it is often hard to find this safety, and the risks associated with getting it wrong can feel overwhelming. There is a great fear of not being accepted and ‘speaking out’ is not experienced as an option in the wider Church. Too often we don’t experience the safety which offers us the freedom to speak out as gay men, as non-binary people, as lesbians or as bisexuals, as trans people, as LGBTIQ+ people, whether single or in a relationship, within the Church. How can we feel

safe in a wider context, especially if priests speak in a morally judgemental way or direct LGBTQ+ people towards harmful conversion practices? How do we educate our broader church while staying safe?

3. Participation

a) What are the obstacles for dialogue?

There is a diversity of experience when it comes to the participation of LGBTQ+ Catholics in the Synodal Process across our members' countries and also across dioceses within these countries. Whilst in some dioceses, LGBTQ+ Catholics have been invited to participate by the local synodal bodies of the church, in most, the inclusion of LGBTQ+ Catholics in the Synodal Process has been met with either ignorance or direct refusal from church authorities. Some LGBTQ+ Catholic groups had already a negative experience with involvement in the Synodal Process during the 2014 and 2015 Synod on Families and Marriage and this has only increased the scepticism among LGBTQ+ Catholics about being involved in this synod.

b) What are the conditions for dialogue?

It is imperative that the issues of vulnerability and lack of safety and respect are taken seriously by those engaging in the attempts of dialogue. We can only participate if there is a guarantee that we will not be judged or threatened with punitive consequences. This could be achieved by:

- Showing respect by using the vocabulary with which LGBTQ+ persons describe themselves such as: LGBTQ+, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, queer etc;
- Being open to and valuing the spiritualities and gifts of all dialogue partners: by fostering real interest in one another;
- Providing the possibility of anonymity to those who feel unsafe to speak out;
- Focussing on what we have in common e.g. sharing with other Catholics - whether "straight" or LGBTQ+ - the experience of being in a relationship (or not) and its challenge to support each other, of divorce, of raising children, of the meaning of love and friendship, of receiving and being blessed;
- Reaching out to those who have been pushed to the margins with an invitation as this is the precondition for dialogue and open up to those who reach out to you.

4. Mission: What is our common mission? What is our proposal for actions of the Synod?

a) Negatively: Rejection of false doctrine

For us as LGBTQ+ Catholics our mission is primarily to liberate people like us from the yoke of traditional moral doctrine, including newly "invented traditions" on homosexual relationships and trans people, which have been laid on our necks. We can't accept being silenced and excluded any longer. From the depth of our informed consciences and in the light of the Gospel we therefore reject as false:

- The moral doctrine articulated e.g., by the previous Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and the Catechism that homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered", and that loving and faithful same-sex relationships are against God's plan;
- The disciplinary rule that gay men can't enter seminaries or religious orders, or become priests or deacons;

- The prohibition of all persons, who aren't male in gender or who have transitioned, to seek ordination or to be ordained;
- The idea of the exclusive complementarity of binary genders and the passive role that must be played by women in our church and in society that results;
- The promotion and support of conversion practices to change one's sexual orientation or gender identity as supported by some bishops' conferences in Europe;
- The ideas as expressed by the previous Congregation for the Catholic Education that the gender identities of trans people should not be recognised or that genital surgery for intersex babies and children is recommendable.

b) Positively: What is our common mission?

We have all been created in the image of God who is beyond gender and we have all been baptised. So, we all take part in the work of spreading the Easter message and making God's reign come true. To this end:

- We have to continually strive to be inviting and inclusive for all;
- We journey together. Any decision made, any pastoral work, has to include those it addresses - nothing about us, without us;
- We have to overcome hierarchical power and pretended service and instead become a church of equals: equal in rights and dignity;
- We rejoice in the richness and diversity of our existence and identities as part of God's plan;
- We cherish sexuality between consenting adults and gender in its diverse expressions as God given gifts.

c) Request for the participation of LGBTIQ+ Catholics in the conversation on the European level and the associated gatherings

We seek, therefore, visible and valued participation in the on-going Synodal Process and the October 2023 Synodal Meeting.

For the Synodal principle of journeying and listening together to materialise, we renew our call for the Vatican to institute an explicit, global Listening Process with LGBTIQ+ Catholics, parents and families, human sciences' experts, theologians, pastoral-workers, religious, clergy and bishops to and beyond October 2023.