



LGBT+ Catholics Westminster Pastoral Council

Chair's AGM Report 2018/2019

Looking back over the past year since the last LGBT+ Catholics Westminster AGM, two main themes emerge; the first is witness, both within the Church and in wider society. The second is inclusion, both in terms of our community's inclusion in our parish and diocese, and our work to make LGBT+ Catholics feel included in the Church.

These themes are exemplified in the 'Building a Bridge' series of discussions, based on Fr James Martin's book of the same name. These began in February 2018, and came to an end in February 2019. Thanks to the hard work of Martin and others from the LGBT+ Catholics Westminster Pastoral Council, the sessions were a huge success, bringing together both LGBT+ people and allies from all over the Westminster diocese.

We were very pleased to welcome Cardinal Vincent Nichols to Mass with our community and our gathering on 13th January. In his sermon, the Cardinal emphasised the unity of baptism, which transcended all other identities. After the service he gave a short speech commending LGBT+ Catholics Westminster as an important sign of welcome and inclusion within Westminster Diocese, not only as individuals who are welcomed but as an identifiable community which is at home within the Church. He even had time for a few selfies with members of the community! Cardinal Vincent also lent his support to this year's pilgrimage to Rome in March, by enabling the group to have an audience with Pope Francis himself. Each pilgrim received a gift of a rosary from Pope Francis who shook hands with the group's members, and the group also attended Pope Francis' Mass & Imposition of Ashes in the Church of Santa Sabina. Many thanks to Martin for arranging the pilgrimage.

Pride is one of our key opportunities to witness to the wider world that it is possible to be LGBT+ and Catholic! Many thanks to Peter Liska, who worked incredibly hard to organise our participation, Martin and Julian for being mainstays of the stall, and everyone who marched, chatted to people at the stall, and attended the Pride ecumenical service. Particular thanks to Fr Keith, who ministered at the Pride service by reading and giving blessings during the Anglican Communion. Peter has written a short report about our experience:

Each year we seem to have a stronger presence in Pride and 2019 as the year of the 50th anniversary of Stonewall riots was no different. For the second year in a row we managed to be present in a new unified graphical form (Logo, materials and T-shirts) that gave us a strong visibility both in the Parade and at the Community stall in Soho Square. Such visibility has brought in new members to our community.

In the Parade we had a diverse and fun group of 25 people marching. The feedback was overwhelming and very positive both from our friends and families, but also from a wider public. We managed to cooperate with Christians Together At Pride (CTAP) on the number of spare wristbands and that strengthened our cooperation ethos with CTAP.

At the stall we had a very positive response as well. We managed to secure the logistics of the stall so that it was sufficiently staffed to make sure that we maximise our outreach. We even had a number of straight/atheist allies come to our stall to just say hello and express support. The photograph of our community with Pope Francis was a major draw!

We managed to renew our stronger presence at the Pride Ecumenical Service with CTAP this year. Having Father Keith participate in the service and give the blessing simultaneously with the Anglican Communion was a major positive signal towards further outreach. We consider this as a major achievement; however we will not stop here in the next years. We will continue to push for more involvement from the Catholics via readings and music.

This year was the 20th anniversary of the Admiral Duncan bombing, and also of the first Mass welcoming LGBT+ Catholics, their parents, families and friends. LGBT+ Catholics Westminster commemorated these events on 27th April with a prayer walk visiting important landmarks in LGBT+ Catholic history, including the Oscar Wilde memorial, St Anne's Soho, the Admiral Duncan and the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption & St Gregory, Warwick St. We ended at Farm Street, where we were welcomed by Fr Dominic and people had the opportunity to see an exhibit about challenging hate crime.

A further event on responding to homophobia was organised by Kirk and Fr Keith, titled 'Your place at the Table - saying No to Homophobia'. This was a day workshop on 5th October exploring internalised and externalised homophobia and the effects it has on our lives. The goal was to make attendees more aware of how homophobia has affected them, and enable LGBT+ and heterosexual communities to have a deeper self-other acceptance. The workshop was well attended, and there are already plans for enabling some of the themes of the workshop to be explored in more depth. Many thanks to Kirk and Fr Keith for organising this.

The community continues to strengthen, especially when it comes to volunteering baked goods for fundraising! We are sorry to say farewell to Chris and the Beacon music group. Although they will be very much missed, Neil has kindly agreed to take over and has really hit the ground running with the formation of the 530 music group. Events such as the Creation walk that Kirk organised in July, and the social events organised by Tom have also given members the opportunity to get to know each other better outside of Mass. We are forging ever closer links with Farm Street; Fr Dominic has been involved in a number of our events, and it was heartening to see that there were a number of positive mentions of the LGBT community in the responses to this year's parish forum. News from the wider Catholic LGBT community is also encouraging, with Masses welcoming LGBT+ people, their families and friends now started in Salford, as well as in the dioceses of Nottingham, Northampton and Clifton.