



MEDIA RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE CIRCULATION

EUROPEAN LGBT+ CATHOLICS JOURNEYING TOGETHER ON THE SYNODAL PATH

Catholic members of the European Forum of LGBT+ Christian Groups and European members of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics have welcomed the Continental Phase of the Church's Synodal Process, first announced by Pope Francis in 2020. However, across Europe, LGBT+ Catholics and their family members have considerably varied experiences of participation in consultations during the Diocesan stage of the Synodal Journey. While in some countries LGBT+ Catholics contributions have been valued and welcomed in National Syntheses, in others, along with other lay-Catholics, they have been marginalised or ignored. How this can be addressed before the October 2023 Synod in Rome remains problematic given the tight time-scale of Synodal processes.

The Continental Stage Document (CSD) gives a global overview and LGBT+ Catholics in Europe were pleased to see some explicit reference to their concerns as quoted in different national submissions. Nevertheless, the 3 concluding Questions proposed by the CSD beg the need to address systemic issues within the Church with a fear that so many of these, evident in the Synodal Listening Phase, may be de-prioritised. Nevertheless, the process has opened up conversations on LGBT+ experiences of integrating faith, gender identity, and sexuality, as never before, and these are being discussed more openly where, in the past they were simply anathema and unwelcome.

Although top-down doctrinal statements have not yet been turned upside down, the *sensus fidelium* is now more clearly heard. A test of the Continental Synodal Assemblies will be as to whether and how the essential reception by the People of God of the Church's teachings and pastoral practice can be made manifest in the ongoing praxis of synodality. Likewise, and this is echoed in many national Synodal Syntheses, there will need to be an ecclesial conversion that emphasises the gifts which LGBT+ Catholics bring to the Church rather than the predominant focus that sees LGBT+ Catholics as problems to be dealt with.

How institutional structures develop, better expressing subsidiarity in decision-making, pastoral praxis, and doctrinal reflection, whether at the Rome level or in the global Church, are a longer-term challenge and task. If the ecclesial culture-change desired by Pope Francis results in a re-affirmation that the Catholic Church is primarily a communion of local Churches with their own identities and perspectives, rather than a pseudo-imperial hierarchical system, this will be a vital restoration of the early-Church tradition.

In responding to the needs of LGBT+ Catholics, parents and families, another means for achieving this will be to initiate a global, trans-continental listening process with LGBT+ Catholics, parents, pastoral workers, theologians, bishops and other clergy, so as to embody a journeying-together rather than a narrower two-way conversation between the LGBT+ people of God and Vatican institutions.

As a first-step, European LGBT+ Catholics will welcome and engage with delegates to the Continental Synodal Assembly to be held in Prague, 5-12 February 2023. They will meet in prayerful ways with Assembly members, including Bishops; offer a Prayer Vigil "to open hearts and minds," and share issues and visions in being a Synodal Church. The English Catholic theologian, James Alison, will offer a keynote address at the LGBT+ Catholics event.

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