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WHEN LGBT+ VOICES ARE HEARD ……

A response from the LGBT+ Catholics Westminster Pastoral Council to the Vatican's Synodal Study Group 9's Final Report:

THEOLOGICAL CRITERIA & SYNODAL METHODOLOGIES FOR SHARED DISCERNMENT OF EMERGING DOCTRINAL, PASTORAL, AND ETHICAL EMERGING ISSUES.

"The Synodal Study Group 9's Final Report has far exceeded our expectations with clear evidence that the submissions we, and others in European Roman Catholic LGBT+ networks made, have hit a mark," says London's LGBT+ Catholics Westminster Pastoral Council.

Study Group 9, one of ten established by the late Pope Francis, to consider detailed questions and practical outcomes of the Roman Catholic Church's 2021-2024 global Synod on Synodality, is clear that, " … we are presenting a simple, provisional and forward-looking summary of the work carried out so far, to be explored further through dialogue and tested in practice. It is not our task to address individual issues in a definitive manner. This Study Group does not have the expertise or the necessary authorisation to do so." " The document, though couched in the formal and academic language of theologians, marks a firm, clear and radical restatement of the principles of the Second Vatican Council," said Joe Stanley, LGBT+ Catholics Westminster.

LGBT+ Catholics Westminster's Martin Pendergast said, "This document, even if it is not a formal Vatican doctrinal statement, is surprising honest in recognising what it calls 'the inadequacy of our current categories and operational paradigms. There is a persistent resistance …to changing our usual mental and behavioural *habitus* (disposition).' "

The Report moves the Church on, firmly, from the stultifying, top-down, imperious model, to the Church as all the People of God, journeying as the community of the faithful, to discern the will of God through the Holy Spirit, who is present in each of us, as we live out the Gospel in particular historical and cultural contexts. It replaces the idea of Authority - the teaching authority of the Church - as "applicative logic," meaning that it decides on the basis of so-called first principles what the teaching of the Church is, irrespective of the impact of that teaching on people's lives, with the idea of Authority as Service.

We applaud the Study Group's flexibility in changing its previous title from 'controversial' to 'emerging' issues, to move away from a "problem-solving" approach towards a more relational dialogue as the Church tries to journey together with all its people. We welcome its affirmation that the shift in terminology "is not merely superficial, but expresses a proposal for a reformulation linked to a paradigm shift."

The document calls, frequently, for *parrhesia* or frank speech, when addressing the concerns of those who are "out of the game or outside the box" including the LGBTQ community, those civilly divorced and remarried, people facing discrimination, victims of abuse and injustice, etc. Nevertheless, this is marred by the constant use of the more ideological "same-sex attraction" when the original (?) Italian version simply refer to "homosexual believers."

A good example of the Report's frankness is its acknowledgment of problems prompted by the approach of the group, Courage, which "by pushing for 'reparative therapy' had the effect of separating faith and sexuality" rather than integrating them. This reflects the Introduction to the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People, authorised by the Catholic Bishops of England & Wales in 1979. Likewise, we welcome the inclusion of two powerful testimonies from gay men in Portugal and the USA, telling the story of how they have integrated their faith and sexuality as same-gendered married couples.

We welcome the Report's highlighting of the principle of "pastorality," moving away from a rigid application of ideo-theological theory to human situations, and emphasising the lived experience of believers, in the light of the Gospel and the discernment of developments in human and social sciences, as a source for renewed operational practices in a synodal Church.

FURTHER DETAILS:

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