

## **Speak Your Truth to our Church with Pride:**

### ***A Guide for LGBTQI People, Families and Allies Participating in the Synodal Process of the Roman Catholic Church 2021-2023***

#### **Background**

Pope Francis has directed the global Roman Catholic community to engage in a 2-year process of conversation with each other, leading up to a Synod of Bishops in October 2023. The goal is to help the entire church “walk together” into a new future. Many hope that the voices of church members will truly help shape the outcomes.

The process began in October 2021. Listening sessions for Catholics have been scheduled and will continue to be scheduled through August 2022. Reports from those coordinating the sessions are due to the General Secretary for the Synod by October 2022. Listening sessions can be held by Dioceses, parishes, and Catholic organizations, and all sponsors have been invited to submit reports.

#### **Goals for the Synod**

Pope Francis has called this Synod with “to imagine a different future for the Church and her institutions, in keeping with the mission she has received.” He links this Synod to the Second Vatican Council and its call for the church to be renewed. The Synod Preparatory Document issued by the Vatican states that a main objective of the process is “living a participative and inclusive ecclesial process that offers everyone – ***especially those who for various reasons find themselves on the margins*** – the opportunity to express themselves and to be heard in order to contribute to the edification of the People of God.” (Paragraph 2, emphasis ours). The Synod documents say the process must be modeled on the example of Jesus, who listens intently and dialogues with people “whom official religion had dismissed as outside the perimeter of grace.” (Paragraph 18) This confirms that we have the right and the duty to be part of speaking our truths to the entire Church. Our voices must be heard by church leaders, as well as the people of the Church.

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**Goals for the Synod, continued**

The preparatory document acknowledges the complexity of being a global church in a diverse world. It speaks to the varying situations in which Catholics find themselves. In some places, we and other Christians represent the majority culture, while in others, we are a persecuted minority. The conveners reflect on cultures in which religious belief has been expelled from the public space, as well as those in which “religious fundamentalism, without respect for the liberties of others, feeds forms of intolerance and violence.” All of this must be reckoned with as the church discerns what it means to “journey together,” which is the only way to learn how to be an instrument of healing and voice for those in need in the world.

The Synod requests the input of members of parishes and dioceses, those who feel disenfranchised, people from other faiths, and groups who wish to submit their own reports. Each report is limited to 10 pages, with supporting documentation welcome. All materials will be reviewed and synthesized by Synod staff before being presented to the bishops in the weeks leading up to the 2023 Synod of Bishops.

**Issues for LGBTQI People and Allies**

Listening sessions coordinated by parishes and dioceses provide a unique opportunity for church leaders and other members of our church to hear about how current teachings and practices impact LGBTQI people, our families, friends, and communities. This is a chance to give personal testimony about your experiences, concerns, and hopes.

It is critical to note that it may not feel or be safe for LGBTQI people, family members, or friends to speak out about their own experiences and concerns in a public setting. In those cases, we urge allies to bring these concerns to listening sessions, and to speak for those who must remain silent. Please note that DignityUSA and other organizations will be offering our own Listening Sessions which will provide safe opportunities for LGBTQI people and supporters to speak to these issues.

If you choose to participate in and speak out during a Listening Session, it is important to acknowledge up front what you love and cherish about the church and your faith. Where do you see the Gospel being lived out? What inspires you? Then you can discuss your concerns and hopes for change, particularly as they relate to the LGBTQI community and families.

## Points to Consider Including:

LGBTQI people are part of our church. So are family members and friends. We love the Church, its liturgy, the sacraments, the good it does in the world.

LGBTQI people share our gifts with the church in many ways – as faithful community members, as volunteers, employees, sisters, priests, brothers. We value the opportunity to serve God's people.

Virtually every Catholic family has LGBTQI members, as does every Catholic community. The impacts of the Church's policies and practices around LGBTQI people have very, very broad impact.

Official church teachings do not support LGBTQI people in living full, happy lives in ways that honor our dignity as created and loved by God. These teachings can be confusing and problematic for families, with many believing they cannot fully accept and embrace their LGBTQI members. These teachings must be changed to affirm that LGBTQI identities and loving are just as sacred as any other identity.

Catholic education systems can be challenging for LGBTQI youth and families. Do your Catholic schools or religious education programs honor the identities of all, or do LGBTQI youth experience repression or bullying? Is there a GSA or other program to promote inclusion and respect for all?

Many LGBTQI people and families have experienced painful exclusion or condemnation from pastors and other church leaders. This can include:

- Negative remarks about being gay or transgender in homilies, pastoral letters, bulletin messages, or statements from church officials
- Being told not to come to Communion
- Being denied other sacraments, either personally or for members of their families (e.g., children of same-sex couples denied Baptism, or told Baptism must be private)
- Being terminated from volunteer ministries or employment, or denied benefits, based on identity or relational/marital status
- Hearing the congregation urged to lobby against LGBTQI legislation
- Being subjected to conversion therapy or directed to Courage

***Anti-LGBTQI teachings and practices are driving people from the church and hurting communities where people have been excluded.***

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### **OUR HOPES**

We want to help our church become more inclusive and affirming. We hope the Synodal process will lead the global Roman Catholic Church to consider the reality of LGBTQI people and our loved ones in the light of fundamental Catholic teaching – the dignity of every human being as a child of God, the obligation to respect the human rights of all people, our duty to pay special attention to those experiencing marginalization, and our obligation to end oppressive structures. Teachings and practices that dehumanize, stigmatize, or exclude LGBTQI people must end in order for the Body of Christ to begin healing.

The Synodal process can add to decades of testimony from LGBTQI Catholics and allies documenting our struggles and persistence in our faith and our relationship with the church. This testimony must be taken seriously, and the calls for significant reform must be heard and acted on. Barriers for full participation in our church must be removed. We urge church officials to establish mechanisms for those who have experienced discrimination within the church to tell their stories and seek justice.

### **NEXT STEPS**

At the conclusion of the Listening Sessions, sponsors are asked to submit reports to the General Secretary of the Synod. You can ask for a copy of that report so that you can see whether and how your input was reflected. The Listening Sessions may also provide new connections with other Catholics who appreciated your speaking out. Stay in touch with them and see how you might work together to bring positive changes to your community.

*If you have concerns about anything in the process, please feel free to contact DignityUSA to discuss them. You can reach [execdir@dignityusa.org](mailto:execdir@dignityusa.org) or 617-918-7783.*