

The Spain-wide network of LGBTI+ Believers Associations offers our collective submission to the Synodal Process.

For the attention of the General Secretariat of the Synod:

We, members of different LGBTI+ Believers Associations in Spain who have prepared this document, have accepted your proposal to participate in the Synodal Way with enthusiasm. We understand the invitation to be universal, and therefore, to include those of us who have so far been kept to the very edges of pastoral attention. Through the channel which is offered us by the preparatory phase of the Synod on Synodality, we wish to share with the whole Church the way in which the Holy Spirit has manifested in a singular way in our lives as LGBTI+ persons, as well as in the lives of our mothers and fathers, allowing us to receive the love of God that is shown in our diversity. In the same way we find ourselves encouraged by the same Spirit to ask the Church to go deeper during the Synod into some necessary changes of attitude and of doctrine with relation to LGBTI+ people, changes which have already begun to take place.

During this synodal process only one of the Spanish dioceses of which we are members has asked to speak with us, while in three others informal contacts have been maintained. By contrast, the others have not replied when we have asked to meet up with their representatives for dialogue. This is but one further piece of evidence of how often we face difficulties and even rejection within our own ecclesial communities when it comes to living and expressing who we are, what we feel, and what we long for. All of which provokes considerable personal, family and community suffering. However, for our part, as members of the ecclesial community, we are committed to continuing to seek dialogue and to build bridges with the different ecclesial bodies: parishes, dioceses, religious congregations and movements.

The Synodal Church is one formed by women and men of open heart, a Church which announces the joy of the Gospel and in which we all walk together. The Church which is moved by the power of Jesus' Word: *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*. It is the Church as People of God which gives priority to mercy, and is constituted by people who allow themselves to be moved by the Spirit, creating a way of walking together without exceptions and exclusions. One in which Tradition and Doctrine are not obstacles to creating community.

Within this reality, we exist, as groups of Christian LGBTI+ women and men, and we are determined to hold firm to our belonging in the Church, and to our invitation into the Synodal Way. Our companions on the journey should know that our life is that of a continuous experience of the love which God has for us. We are told that we are in sin. Yet for that reason, who knows better than we what it is to persevere in the love of the Father? We are insulted and persecuted, and through that we have learned mercy and forgiveness.

The Synodal way is only possible if there is reciprocal listening and a sincere dialogue. And the Church has a listening debt with relation to groups that it has distanced, excluded and marginalized. Especially divorced people, and those who live the different realities which make up the LGBTI+ collective. Those of us who are of different sexual orientation or gender identity are not the fruit of some capricious "Gender Ideology". Our real existence as something inherent in and proper to human nature has been amply demonstrated by biology, psychology, psychiatry, and anthropology among other sciences. It does not correspond to some whim, or to a pernicious and self-induced immaturity of personality.

We LGBTI+ people are in the Church with an attitude of serene and respectful dialogue. Nevertheless the incomprehension and the situations of rejection which we have, on occasions, experienced, have been motives for our faith to be strengthened and for us to persevere in a sincere and committed willingness to dialogue with the whole Christian community which is being built up through encounter, dialogue and communion, from all that unites us and enriches us in our diversity.

We believe, furthermore, that the valuable gifts which God has bestowed on us include that of our own affectivity, a reflection of our capacity to love God and our neighbour. For this reason we can be, and in fact are, examples of lived journeys in which faith and affectivity have been reconciled. This conviction comes from a process, deeply matured and discerned, of listening to ourselves, to others, and to the God who speaks to us in our daily lives.

Our path in the Church is one in the company of other marginalized groups. For that reason we cannot forget the role of women in the Church. LGBTI+ people make our way alongside them. However we cannot and do not want to deny reality, the necessary basis for opening up authentic ecclesial dialogue. All female and male baptised people form part of the Church, and it is Jesus Christ himself who invites us to walk together with him. Jesus presents himself as *the Way, the Truth and the Life*. Yet, in reality, in this path which the Messiah sets out, there is favouritism, denial of rights and there are obvious exclusions. The image which is given is that of a way which has been appropriated by those who determine what is doctrine and tradition. While other parallel pathways traversed by the rest of God's people, not allowed to feel part of "the people of God", are sidelined.

Sometimes we have the sensation that LGBTI+ people are invisible when it comes to pastoral activity. Homilies and pastoral projects give us the impression that we don't exist; and when our existence is recognised, it is typically not with a positive tone. We find ourselves being treated to a double standard which depends enormously on which minister happens to be on duty. And that is not acceptable. We have undergone pressures from pastoral, employment, and family spheres, pushing us to abandon jobs, commitments, and even pastoral activities, on account of who we are.

Our reality is deliberately left on the margins, and, indeed, we are accustomed to living on the frontiers of the Church. The LGBTI+ community, divorced people, consecrated people who have left their ministries to marry, and of course, all women, barred by tradition from receiving the sacrament of Orders, thus ensuring that their decision-making capacity in the Church is always below that of men.

We find severely lacking any sort of PROPHEMIC DENUNCIATION. While there exist many expressions of support for, and official denunciations of evil treatment against other realities (for instance, women and migrants), it is forgotten that LGBTIPHOBIA is, as the United Nations has recognised, yet one more violation of human rights. The LGBTI+ people who flee from the 70 countries in the world where their reality leads to imprisonment, or from the 5 in which it leads to the death penalty, as well as all those who every year seek asylum to save their lives, are rendered invisible. This silence is both painful and complicit in injustice.

Our companions along the way should learn that our LGBTI+ reality has traditionally been hidden away or condemned, obliging us to live double lives of falsity, denying who we are so as to be able to be accepted within the Church and its structures. We were forced to keep the talents which God gave us as daughters and sons, buried, as if, despite their divine origin, they were something evil.

This experience of rejection has led to many LGBTI+ people, as well as those from other similar groups, abandoning the Church, and even apostatising from the Faith. Such abandonment flows naturally from the intransigent positions set out in recent Roman doctrinal documents: (*Persona Humana* CDF 29/12/1975) and (*Homosexualitatis Problema* CDF, 1/10/1986). These documents espouse a vision that is not in conformity with scientific study, yet underpins the formulations found in numbers 2357, 2358, and 2359 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Attempts at institutional dialogue have, with few exceptions, become invisible: we are asked for discretion, and so the attempts have little or no incidence in the local Church. The reality of families formed by LGBTI+ people is also an invisible reality. And on occasions our children's access to the sacraments (something that is a right for all the baptized faithful) depends on the whim of the minister we meet up with.

The same thing happens with trans women who, owing to living in a situation of prostitution, thereby don't enter into the ecclesial category by which some refer to "people at the margins". As a general rule the stories of trans people's relationship with the Church bear witness to their having undergone situations of rejection, suffering or not being understood. When indeed they haven't been outright mocked or despised by some minister on account of their condition. The realities of bisexuality and intersexuality and their acceptance are simply not even considered in ecclesial circles.

In spite of these difficulties, we want a Mother Church, one which is inclined to treat us as daughters and sons, and which draws close to us with the intention of getting to know us and eliminating prejudices which lead to hatred.

We would like to take advantage of this opportunity for dialogue to make a series of suggestions for things which should be taken into consideration as necessary on the path to implementing the reality of the LGBTI+ collective in the Church.

Taking into account the foregoing, and with all respect, we propose:

- WELCOME AND FULL INTEGRATION. LGBTI+ people should be genuinely and fully welcomed within the bosom of the Church with identical conditions to those of any other baptized person. Their full participation cannot be made to depend on them renouncing their identity or a significant relationship. Each LGBTI+ person must be admitted as yet one more unique member, for the building up of the mystical body of Christ, loved by God as they are, gift of God's diversity, integrated into the people of the Church. We ask that the ideal of a full communion among the baptized be achieved, where the reality of diversity is present in every ecclesial space. We are aware that real experiences of this LGBTI+ pastoral are being lived out, and it seems urgent to us that clear common criteria be elucidated in the pastoral sphere, so as to avoid the arbitrariness of some duty officers.
- ECCLESIAL REFLECTION. We invite our pastors of the Catholic Church to a serene reflection, drawing close to LGBTI+ reality. In this way the Church would be a moral reference point for the loving welcome of all people, exemplifying the social friendship to which *Fratelli Tutti* invites us.
- DOCTRINE. For our welcome and integration to be full, it is necessary to revise some aspects of doctrine in relation to LGBTI+ people. For Christians, the central and definitive reference is the Gospel. On many occasions Jesus himself is portrayed as

welcoming each person who turns to him in search of help: the woman at the well of Samaria; the woman taken in adultery, the prodigal son, the centurion... In contrast with Jesus' practice, we find The Catechism of the Catholic Church's claim concerning our "objectively disordered inclination". This must be revised and eliminated in the light both of current scientific knowledge and current social reality. It both provokes us to take distance from the Church and helps generate discrimination against us. It will be necessary to revise other documents which make similar claims leading to rejection, and which have provided the background to this claim. For this to happen we request the creation of a group to reflect on gender at the most universal level, such as that offered by the Vatican. We commit ourselves from the rich diversity which characterize our groups (in which there are psychologists, professionals from different areas, theologians) to make our contribution through work and reflection. A group which might have ramifications at different national and diocesan levels.

- WELCOME IN FAMILIES. The Church needs to accompany and form families. We say this because, living in our reality, we have known, sadly, cases where Christian families with LGBTI+ children have rejected them on learning of their sexual diversity. The Universal Church manifests first of all in the domestic Church. And this ought to offer the first and most palpable sign of a loving welcome to its members, independently of their sexual orientation or gender identity, so that they can discover and live their reality fully within a family context. We ask our Church actively to support these family domestic churches, so that they can receive all their members with the same love with which God welcomes all of us, God's children. We request that all dioceses pay attention to, respect, and implement *Amoris Laetitia* number 250.
- ACCESS TO SACRAMENTS. We need urgently to revise the theology of the sacraments on account of their implications for the pastoral life of the Church, since life in the sacraments is the food of faith for the whole community. They suppose a non-discriminating and full welcome being made manifestly visible by the community. LGBTI+ people should have access to all the sacraments on the same basis as everyone else, especially the sacraments related to mission and service: Orders and Marriage. Our experience is that their witness of life enriches the community's life of faith in unique and irreplaceable ways.
- WELCOME WITHIN PARISHES AND COMMUNITIES. In order to bring about an effective welcome without delay, we recommend proactively encouraging parishes and communities to accept and integrate their LGBTI+ members by promoting communal sensitivity training activities allowing integration into community life. Those in charge will pay special attention to these people and those close to them, since it is unfortunately far too often the case that they are a source of conflict within their own families. Furthermore, and following Pope Francis' directions on the protection of minors, we ask for guarantees that LGBTI+ children and adolescents be protected and accompanied in such a way that they can grow in faith while in safe surroundings like any other minors.
- EDUCATION. The Church's educational dimension, through both its catechetical activity and Catholic teaching institutions, ought to incorporate reflection on LGBTI+ reality from a perspective of unconditional acceptance and welcome. We propose, additionally, that Catholic schools should avail themselves of the chance to declare themselves "safe zones", thus showing clearly and publicly their rejection of any sort of hate crime, including those flowing from LGBTIPHOBIA.

We also propose that education in affectivity and emotional life should be given in seminaries and novitiates, to an even greater extent than now. Having balanced ministers in this field will be fundamental for a shared journey tending towards acceptance

- **VISIBILITY.** LGBTI+ people are already in the Church, as priests, members of female and male religious congregations, and lay people in parishes and ecclesial movements. However, many of them live their orientation or their sexual identity in secret. In some cases, because they are unable to recognize and accept it; and in other cases, because even though they do recognize it, they are frightened to be known by the community. Permanently hiding what they are wounds them and deprives them of living their vocation in community to its fullness. We must make it easier for them to become “visible”, so that they can be received as they are, can transform their own communities from within, and enable the welcome of those who decided, or were forced, to remain outside them.
- **ASKING FORGIVENESS.** The welcome which we are inviting the Church to perform inevitably carries with it a recognition of the years of rejection and discrimination, with their terrible consequences of pain and inner rupture for those LGBTI+ people who were integrated within the bosom of the Church. We have to ask forgiveness publicly, starting from the level of the Universal Church, and including each local Church and Parish, for the damage caused to so many people loved by God in different ways, and yet rejected by their Church.

All of us now have to carry on working within the bosom of the Church which we love, in which we have known Jesus, the totally inclusive one, so that it becomes ever more fully welcoming. May God, who has given talents to believers with different sexual orientations and gender identities, continue to multiply those talents, making them available for the service of God’s Kingdom with the collaboration of our pastors.

We ask the Spirit to guide us in our walking together in community, and we thank you for the possibility of contributing to that journey as members of the Church.

Signatories:

- **Associació Cristiana de Lesbianes, Gais, Transsexuals i Bisexuals - ACGIL (Catalunya)**
- **BETANIA LGTBI+ - Bilbao (Euskadi)**
- **CHRISMUR Cristianos LGBTQI+ (Región de Murcia)**
- **CRISMHOM Comunidad cristiana LGTBI+H. Asociación de diversidad sexual e identidad de género (Comunidad de Madrid)**
- **CRISTIANOS TRANS (España)**
- **Espacio de diversidad LGTBI - CVX-San Ignacio-Valencia (Comunitat Valenciana)**
- **Grupo de Espiritualidad «La Casita»- Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Islas Canarias)**
- **Grupo de Fe Y Espiritualidad - FELGTTBI+ (España)**
- **ICHTHYS Comunidad y Asociación de Cristianas y Cristianos LGTB+H de Sevilla (Andalucía)**
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