



Synod on Synodality Synthesis Document Report April 2024

AGLOChicago (Archdiocesan Gay and Lesbian Outreach) was founded by the Archdiocese of Chicago in 1988 to minister to Chicago's LGBTQ+ community. Since that time, AGLO has brought together the Catholic LGBTQ+ community, providing a spiritual home, a safe space to recharge, and a place to grow in relationship with God and neighbor.

AGLO has been active in convening our community around the Synod on Synodality starting in 2021, including submitting its first synod report to the Archdiocese of Chicago. When asked for feedback on the October 2023 Synod Synthesis Document, AGLO convened two Listening Sessions and offered an online feedback tool to our community. To prepare for providing feedback, participants were asked to reflect on a Scripture passage (Romans 12) and read the Synthesis Document. All participants were then asked to reflect on the question, "How can we be a Synodal church in mission?" What follows is a summary of the feedback we received.

Love of the Catholic faith and the Synodal process

Participants expressed their appreciation for the Synodal process and the Church's willingness to be in open dialogue.

I think this is an opportunity for us to contribute to the Church from the local community...what our gifts are, where our insights are, what our experiences are, what our stories are. I don't know that we listen to each other's stories enough.

Several participants also talked about an appreciation for and the tremendous effort that building a synodal process entails.

It [Synodality] is very biblical. It goes way back. If we are going to be operating on a synodal model from now on, which is great news, a listening church, people need to be educated about what the Synod is and unlearn their prejudice against it.

I think listening is important, but it's not really the goal. It's not the goal just to listen. Listening hopefully will change people's minds and lead to some kind of action.

I heard constructive dialog as being a way to bridge differences...I heard about resilience and a willingness to continue to engage with the Church and in the body of Christ despite marginalization by the institution itself.

Participants overwhelmingly acknowledged that they had a love of their Catholic faith and of the Church. They spoke about their commitment to continuing to serve and engage with the Church, and that this love of their faith has continued to keep them engaged with the Church.

I'm very proudly Catholic and I know it is essential in my life. And I'm also proudly gay...we are all just Children of God looking for the same, and that is the love of God.

Many spoke about this commitment despite their experiences of being rejected, despised, and persecuted.

On being both Catholic and LGBTQ+

As in our 2021 listening sessions, a number of participants expressed how difficult it is for them to be open about their Catholic identity when in the LGBTQ+ community, and open about their LGBTQ+ when in the Catholic community. Several talked about a feeling of deep loneliness, as the Church rejects their LGBTQ+ identity and the outside world rejects their Catholic identity, thus being left in a place of hopelessness, shame and unlovable with no place to thrive.

It feels contradictory...In Boystown, I can be gay, but not Catholic. And that's really challenging. And sometimes at the Newman Center, I feel like I can be Catholic, but not gay...what is the meaning of [being] Catholic, young and gay?

I felt at the time that the Church does not want all of me. I lost my spiritual home.

I felt like I wasn't able to truly be myself and also be a part of the Church, so I stepped away from the Church for quite some time.

Another stated he and his partner have been rejected by other parishioners during the sign of peace, which has wounded them. And another stated that he was called “Intrinsically Disordered” by a family member, using the very words of the Church to harm him deeply.

A Call for a Welcoming Church

Many participants expressed how the Church should be a place of Jesus' radical love, hospitality, and mercy -- a welcome place for all that allows for transformation and healing.

I liked what Pope Francis said – that the Church needs to be a field hospital for the wounded rather than a place for the righteous only...You can't spread the Gospel, you can't spread the Good News, for people who are overwhelmed, in pain, or are overburdened with life's stresses. And it needs to be seen as a place for those in need of healing. And the most wounded among us have lived complicated and often imperfect lives.

I believe that God wants the focus of the Church to be on honesty, compassion, forgiveness, and restoration, not judgement. Judgement is there, but it shouldn't be the primary thing on all neighbors, including LGBTQ.

The oppressed, the marginalized, the insulted, the spat upon, the contemptuous part of the Body of Christ are the very people that helped me accept myself as gay and love myself as gay.

All participants reported that, despite being Baptized members of the Body of Christ, they felt unheard, unwanted, and unnamed in the Synod Synthesis document. They expressed how hard it is to feel a part of the Church if the Church cannot name us. They talked about how the Synthesis document did not name the LGBTQ+ community, and how hurtful this was given the significant participation of the LGBTQ+ community in the first round of synodal listening sessions. Only by inference could participants find any reference to the community. By being unnamed, participants felt erased from the Church.

When I was reading the document, I felt invisible. I had to read between the lines for my LGBTQ identity. And even when they do call it out, it doesn't affirm or promise anything – a promise to listen but not do.

I feel like the space they leave for interpretation rather than calling out identity and discrimination leaves room for persecution and homophobia. It validates those who hate what I am and that I call myself Catholic.

Women should be at the table at all levels of the Church because women make up over 50% of the population – so that’s what’s missing. Right now, they just don’t have a place. We need to hear their voices.

Some people made reference to the lack of specificity in the document as like being erased – and that it is equal to genocide when a people and their culture are excluded from the community of faith. They said that the word Catholic therefore does not mean “universal” but rather a community that can pick and choose who belongs.

Some stated how difficult it is to feel welcomed when policies against the LGBTQ+ community and firings of LGBTQ people are prevalent. They further emphasized the need to focus on social justice teaching as all people should be able to agree that the Church ought to support the civil rights of LGBTQ+ people, such as fair housing and equal employment.

I think that would be a nice first step...stop firing your own employees who are gay if you expect gay people to join your church.

That steps be taken to review past language that was used in the documents for LGBTQ folks, the Vatican documents, and that some education take place about future documents to remediate the very hurtful language that’s used.

AGLO as a model for Inclusion

Participants expressed how important AGLO is to their sense of connection with the Church. They stated that AGLO provides a safe place to practice their faith, a supportive place for them to heal from religious persecution. They said it is a unique organization in the United States from which every diocese would benefit.

That’s what I like about AGLO...there are a lot of people who go to AGLO who have had to overcome adversity and personal wounds, and you can feel that from them. You can feel the lack of judgment and self-righteousness in the space among the congregants.

It [AGLO] is a lifesaver for a lot of people and there’s been so many people that are part of AGLO who were deeply, deeply wounded by the hands of the Church. It’s just so desperately needed and is needed in every Archdiocese...

I felt I could bring my whole self to Church before God.

Conclusion

AGLOChicago appreciates the opportunity to once again participate in the Synod on Synodality and for the Church’s willingness to seek the voice of the LGBTQ+ community during this process. We are committed to walking with our community as we seek to do the will of God – to love God with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our soul. And to love our neighbor as ourselves.