News

People hold a rainbow flag and signs saying "Jesus Loves Gay People" during a 2014 gay pride

People hold a rainbow flag and signs during a 2014 gay pride parade in Oslo, Norway. In Zambia, some LGBTQ Catholics said a church campaign against homosexuality has made them feel unsafe. (CNS photo/Terje Bendiksby, NTB Scanpix via Reuters)

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Catholic workers in Zambia have been conducting a campaign to raise awareness of LGBTQ trends that seem to be increasing in society and becoming an acceptable norm.

Catechist Nathan Tembo said the people of Zambia believe in heterosexual orientation and will not allow "a few immoral people" to mislead the general public into thinking LGBTQ is the way of life.

"During the Mass and when we visit people in their homes or community meetings, we tell them to speak against immorality issues such as gay and lesbianism," said Tembo. "People should not accept such vices in our society, because we will raise an evil generation where men will marry each other and women will also marry each

other."

"We have started meeting youths to impart Christian values to become responsible individuals in society," he added.

The southern African nation of more than 18 million people criminalizes same-sex activity. People convicted of homosexual acts serve a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison.

However, church leaders have said the government is not enforcing the law.

In late September, Archbishop Alick Banda of Lusaka said: "LGBTQ+ will become an acceptable norm in Zambia, despite the existence of laws that criminalize these activities and worse still being offensive to our cultural and Christian values. ... Unfortunately, the law enforcement agents and the president who took (an) oath to protect the constitution seem to be paying a blind eye. The question that begs an answer is: Is it by design or by default?"

Banda said the church had urged the priests, catechists, and other parish leaders across the country to discourage people from engaging in or promoting homosexual practices.

The Zambian government denied the criticism and said it was enforcing the law.

Fr. Francis Mukosa, secretary-general of the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops, said homosexual acts had increased in the country, but the church is working to give people strong moral values to resist the practice in any form. He said homosexuality is contrary to God's purpose and plan for human sexuality.

"We are going to nurture our children by giving them moral knowledge that will help them become responsible people in the future," he said. "We encourage elders, parents, and guardians to lead society into doing the right things that please God. We condemn any acts of homosexuality, and I urge Christians to unite in fighting the practice through prayers."

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Members of the LGBTQ community have criticized the church for targeting them instead of embracing them as part of society.

"We are not feeling safe right now because religious leaders have incited their people to attack us," said one LGBTQ Zambian. "Church leaders should know that this country does not belong to Christians only. We have other religions like Muslims and Hindus, and everyone has a right to freedom of association and worship."

Some LGBTQ people defended their sexuality by saying they are children of God and accused church leaders of making statements that isolated them and made them turn away from the church. They said it was hypocritical for the church to preach about God's love and yet refuse to accommodate and love all people regardless of their sexual orientation.

"We are people and children of God, and we are all equal before God," said one gay activist who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of arrest by police or attacks by angry mobs. "It's difficult to change what is in someone, because they were created that way. I wonder why people are questioning the way God created us, because it's not our wish. We are many, and they should embrace and learn to live with us because we will never cease to exist."

Mukosa agreed with some of their statements, saying that although homosexual acts are not godly, people should not criminalize homosexuals.

"As a church, we need to help these people come out of that immoral behavior instead of attacking them daily. The church should be a refuge for sinners where we convert them to become better people in society," he said.

"I am not supporting them, but when they break the law, they should be punished according to our laws, not through attacks from the public," he added.

In March 2021, the Vatican issued a statement -- approved by Pope Francis -- that said while homosexual men and women must be respected, any form of blessing a same-sex union is "illicit." The negative judgment is on the blessing of unions, not the people who may still receive a blessing as individuals, it said.

In an explanatory note also approved by Francis, the Vatican said: "The Christian community and its pastors are called to welcome with respect and sensitivity persons with homosexual inclinations and will know how to find the most appropriate ways, consistent with church teaching, to proclaim to them the Gospel in its fullness."

Later, Cardinal Kevin J. Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life, said people live and experience so many different situations, and no matter where they are in life, even when they cannot participate fully in the life of the church, "that does not mean that they are not to be accompanied by us and by the people of parishes."

"We accompany all people," the cardinal said.