Opinion
Guest Voices

Person sits on sidewalk next to a sign that says, "Trans kids, hang in there."

A young demonstrator sits during a protest rally outside the Georgia Capitol in Atlanta March 20 after the state House and Senate voted to prohibit most surgeries and hormone replacement therapies for minors. (OSV News/Reuters/Megan Varner)



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It has been a tense year to be transgender in America, with 586 bills brought against us regarding everything from access to basic health care, education, athletics, legal recognition and, essentially, the right to publicly exist. In addition, those of us who identify as Catholic have endured having our validity as members of the church questioned as a topic of hot debate, stoked by hateful comments from prominent figures (including religious leaders) within the conservative community.

Dioceses across the United States have released documents about transgender people throughout the year, most of which offer no real acknowledgment of the lived experience of being transgender and instead double down on a literal interpretation of the Genesis story ("male and female, He created them"). These documents fall grievously short of recognizing the dignity of transgender people or science's evolving understanding of gender. Most painfully, they fail to offer even the most basic pastoral care to the Catholics residing in their dioceses. (An exception is the Diocese of Davenport, which released an excellent document taking these points

into consideration).

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Now, only a few weeks after the synod on synodality, where discussion of LGBTQ issues was included for the first time, the Vatican has released a document signed by Pope Francis addressing participation of "transsexual" and "homo-affective" people in being baptized and serving as godparents or marriage witnesses.

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Despite fumbling the language a bit ("transsexual" is an outdated term the community no longer uses), the document recognizes transgender people as members of the faith community who will and should want to participate in the church. This is not a dramatic pivot for Pope Francis: He has previously emphasized that the church must have very serious reasons for turning someone away and must be especially hesitant before denying baptism.

Some in the church found this statement outrageous for suggesting that transgender individuals should have the opportunity to participate in these ways, but that is precisely why a document like this is important. Transgender Catholics are here. We exist. We face all kinds of discrimination and prejudice in society; shouldn’t church be a place where we get to experience the love of Christ, just like our neighbor? Shouldn't it be a place where we get to participate as equals, just like everyone else?

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When I came out as transgender in 2019, my younger sister was planning her wedding. After the announcement of my transition, my father called me to deliver the news that my sister and her fiancé only wanted to have a female maid of honor, effectively disinviting me from the role in the wedding party I had previously been asked to hold. Needless to say, the pain of being excluded as a witness to their

marriage was significant. I wonder what would have happened had a pastoral priest or bishop accompanied my family through this time in the spirit of this recent Vatican note.

It is easy to jump to conclusions about what it means to be transgender, or to be wary of the unknown. This reality only underscores the importance of normalizing the inclusion of LGBTQ folks in conversations about church life. Trans Catholics exist across this country; it is wrong to pretend that we don't. We are not monsters, or political inventions, or a modern fantasy. Transgender people have existed throughout history and in every human culture. What gifts could we bring to the church family if its members fully welcomed us in?