Opinion
Guest Voices



Max Kuzma, a Catholic transgender man, and Loretto Sr. Jeannine Gramick, co-founder of the LGBTQ Catholic advocacy group New Ways Ministry, speak before Kuzma presents on the panel "Transgender Catholics and the Church" on Aug. 3 at the Outreach 2024 LGBTQ Catholic Ministry Conference. (Courtesy of Max Kuzma)



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At the opening prayer service for the Outreach 2024 LGBTQ Catholic Ministry Conference, presider Lynne Gray shared some beautiful words with the packed Dahlgren Chapel at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. "No matter what you have been told, you are blessed. You are holy head to toe ... in all your genders and sexualities."

She went on to directly name identities within the LGBTQ community that get mentioned only very rarely in church — not just the identities of gay and lesbian but also naming transgender, asexual and nonbinary identities.

She added, "You are holy in your *scars*," and it moved me so profoundly that I got chills. As a transgender man who has gone through medical transition, I do have some scars. And while the physical ones have healed, some of the spiritual ones remain.

When I first started my transition journey and changed my name on my social media accounts, most people from the conservative Catholic community that I was involved with abruptly stopped talking to me in person or online — even though I was still very Catholic! But some weren't silent about their biases and concerns: My sexuality was questioned, my formative relationship with my parents was analyzed, my masculinity was debated, and so on.

Someone I didn't know well once messaged me, "Can I ask you a personal question?" The question was "What about the resurrection of the body?" My answer: I'm pretty sure Jesus has some scars too.

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So hearing Lynne describe scars as holy that Friday evening in the Dahlgren Chapel was profoundly moving. I stood alongside other LGBTQ Catholics in a stone chapel

filled with stained glass and sang a hymn by Mark Miller: "As we are, we are yours: in the many forms we take. Through the changes and the challenges we face. As we are, we are yours, with the many gifts we bring and our lives are made to magnify your grace."

We are yours, God, in all our genders and sexualities. We are yours, transgender scars and all. Our LGBTQ identities do not diminish our goodness; we magnify God's grace.

My parents and former church family may have left me to go through my transition alone, but I never could have anticipated finding a community like Outreach. I still remember my first year attending Outreach and how cautiously I walked up to the registration table. After years of Catholics emphasizing they loved me but never making room for all of me, I was not quick to trust again.

And then I saw the words on the front cover of the conference program: Welcome. God loves you. I attended panels and talks where gay Catholics spoke openly about their lives, their partners and spouses, and I heard from gay clergy and allies who have faithfully walked with the LGBTQ community for decades.

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The affirming LGBTQ Catholic community was fully alive in a way that gave me a divine surprise, like Moses encountering the supernaturally burning bush and hearing the voice of God say, "Remove your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground."

I have made deep, lasting friendships with people I've met through this community. I have met mentors and role models who sustain me through their examples and prayers. I've been able to share my own story with people who are really listening, and I've heard their stories too. I'm not alone anymore.

This year at the Aug. 2-4 conference, I was a panelist, sharing my story alongside transwoman Maureen Rasmussen on the panel "Transgender Catholics and the Church." We both spoke about how important our Catholic faith has been to us throughout our lives. (Dominican Sr. Luisa Derouen, who has ministered to the transgender community for more than 25 years, described Maureen this way: "She's as Catholic as it gets!")

For the two of us — and for so many other transgender Catholics — our transition has been an integral part of our spiritual journey. Embracing the full truth of who we are, as difficult as it has been in an intolerant world, has borne the fruit not only of our own flourishing and happiness but also made manifest the promise in Isaiah: "Be not afraid. I will hold onto you with my victorious right hand."

God's love for the LGBTQ community is abundantly visible at a place like the Outreach conference. It's a place where the word "welcome" really means welcome. My hope for the church is that this true meaning of welcome will spread. My hope is that the greater Catholic community will see the beautiful witness of LGBTQ Catholics professing and sharing in the beauty of the faith, and understand as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians: We were all baptized by one Spirit. We are one whole, though made up of many parts.