Opinion
Guest Voices
Members of the General Secretariat of the Synod attend a news conference at the Vatican Oc

Members of the General Secretariat of the Synod, from left, Msgr. Riccardo Battocchio and Jesuit Fr. Giacomo Costa, both special secretaries for the synodal assembly; Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, relator general of the synod; and Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the synod, attend a news conference at the Vatican Oct. 26. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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"Is it worth being Catholic anymore?" I have not entertained this question in years, though for a time in my early 20s, it was a persistent companion. It came back on Oct. 26, though, as I read the Synod General Assembly's final document.

I felt deflated that once again LGBTQ+ people were not named and that ordination for women was still a bridge too far. At the Vatican press briefing, where many celebrated this text, I wanted to ask the cardinal panelists: "What do you say to queer Catholics like me, who believed in synodality and invested in this process, and yet find ourselves disappointed or disillusioned?"

I didn't ask my question. I left the briefing, stepping into St. Peter's Square to a candlelight rosary procession accompanied by Latin chants resounding through the colonnades. In moments when I'm tired and losing hope, a line from Mary Karr's poem "The Voice of God" comes to mind: "put down that gun, you need a sandwich." So, I bought gelato for the walk home and said I would pick everything up in the morning.

The next day, I reread the synod document at a slower pace, pausing to watch people in the park where I sat. The text struck me in an entirely different way. A wide array of issues, concrete proposals and even a few truly beautiful sections came to light. It is an imperfect document, and yet, I perceive in it the Catholic faith that has consoled and encouraged me. Pockets of true hope exist in the muddle of jargon and citations.

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Here's the paradox: The assembly envisions a church in which I can see myself, yet the assembly's vision cannot see me, as a bisexual Catholic, and my queer siblings, in its vision of church. Or, at least, it refused to name us directly in that vision.

Some of the commentaries so far explain that, indeed, the assembly implicitly includes LGBTQ+ people in its calls for welcome. Even LGBTQ+ advocates have suggested it is not a problem that the LGBTQ+ community is not mentioned by name because they perceive we are included in the generic exhortations to care for "marginalized minorities" or "minorities of all kinds." Others saw success because the tone or "vibes" in the synod hall were better than last year.

By my count, at least 35 disparate groups had at least a few lines, or sometimes a paragraph, addressed to them — women, disabled people, migrants and refugees, priests, other Christians, children, lectors, the poor, the Earth and more. The document names victims of caste discrimination, racism, sexual and physical abuse and war. Some read paragraph 50's desire to include those "feeling excluded or judged because of their marital situation, identity or sexuality" as being about

LGBTQ+ people. Maybe. Maybe not. Could the authors not agree to at least refer to "gender identity" and "sexual orientation" to show that this topic included LGBTQ+ people?

Good writing considers not only the message an author wishes to convey, but how the audience will receive it. Explicitly naming different groups, like those mentioned above, helps with that reception. It says plainly: You are part of this whole big thing and your participation is desired. Alternatively, the message is quite different when so many other groups are invited by name and LGBTQ+ people are not — especially when we were so often recognized in the preceding stages of this synodal process, including by the Vatican.

Of the many, many issues the synod assembly took up over two years, including some very contentious ones, it seems LGBTQ+ people are so uniquely difficult as a topic that we were not even able to be named, never mind have our concerns addressed. That is an error that must be corrected if there is to be a future for a synodal church. Silence and omission are just not acceptable or sustainable.

Exclusion is a painful feeling, one that can color the way everything else is experienced. Most LGBTQ+ Catholics and allies know what it is like to have Mass ruined by a nasty homily or to sense they are not quite welcome at a parish. The synod document's omission of gender and sexual identity initially colored how I read everything else in it, even the good parts.

But, like queer Catholics too often must do, I opted to look beyond these negative emotions to see what else God was doing in spite of the church's shortcomings. I am grateful to have found fresh eyes and a sunny park bench to reread this document.

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I remain a believer in synodality as the path for our church, and the assembly's final document, which is now part of Pope Francis' magisterial teaching, affirmed that belief. Even with its grave flaws, it offers innovations to bring real change. Synodality will not truly be realized, though, if harmony and consensus can only be achieved by keeping certain topics repressed (or buried in study groups).

The final document's omission of LGBTQ+ inclusion indicates it is indeed one of the most difficult conversations for a global church. That's why the question must be on

the church's agenda as we move to implement synodality.

Is it worth being Catholic anymore? I cannot answer this question for anyone else, but the answer for me is "yes." Here is what I say to fellow LGBTQ+ and ally Catholics who have also been disappointed and disillusioned: Take a few days off, find a park bench and begin the document anew. You will find in it that God has given us the very tools we need to build a welcoming church that is a home for all.

This story appears in the **Synod on Synodality** feature series. View the full series.