Opinion
Guest Voices



People hold rainbow-colored umbrellas and flags at a demonstration at the U.S. Supreme Court on Dec. 4, 2024. President Donald Trump signed executive orders Jan. 20 that direct the U.S. government to only recognize two sexes, male and female, and another ending diversity, equity and inclusion programs within federal agencies. (OSV News/Reuters/Benoit Tessier)



by Maxwell Kuzma

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On the morning of President Trump's inauguration, there was a hard, cold weight in the pit of my stomach. I went to work and chatted with co-workers, feigning normalcy while wondering if this time tomorrow I would still be able to fill my testosterone prescription. Years of unrelenting political attacks on transgender people had reached a horrifying pitch leading up to the presidential election (the Trump campaign allegedly spent more on anti-trans ads than on any other strategy), and the sitting president now used his inauguration day to enshrine transphobia into the law of the land.

When the leader of your own country wants to legislate you out of existence, how do you keep getting out of bed to face the fresh horrors?

I chose to spare myself the degradation of watching the inauguration live, but afterward located information detailing his intentions for trans Americans. The executive order titled "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government" pulls no punches. Its title, structure and language target transgender women (while largely ignoring the existence of transgender men and nonbinary or intersex people), ordering their removal from female-only spaces for the "dignity, safety, and well-being" of cis-gender women — despite evidence that trans women pose no particular risk to cisgender women in such spaces. I am not sure that President Trump, a man found liable for sexual abuse, who has bragged about sexually assaulting women, is a trustworthy decision-maker regarding women's safety.

The Trump administration has also pulled down a web page honoring Nex Benedict (a nonbinary adolescent who died after sustaining injuries related to identity-based bullying in Oklahoma in February 2024), as well as a page honoring Matthew Shepard (a gay man violently murdered in 1998). Notably, calls to a LGBTQ youth crisis hotline spiked by 33% the Monday of Trump's inauguration. Real lives are at stake, and transgender people have become the sacrificial lamb on the altar of power.

This executive order represents a new era of barriers to access to essential resources and services for LGBTQ people in general, and for transgender people in particular. For trans adults like myself who have been through the major milestones of transition, it is a kind of whiplash to witness the prompt removal of infrastructure which has been scientifically and medically proven to save lives.

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Disappointingly, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops betrayed their pastoral duty to transgender American Catholics last week. In an official statement, our bishops spoke up on behalf of other marginalized groups impacted by Trump's executive orders but failed to extend that same care to transgender members of their flock. On the contrary, the statement refers to the president's refusing trans people the dignity of describing their own embodied experience as something "positive." The statement then had the curious audacity to go on to claim that "It is our hope that the leadership of our Country will reconsider those actions which disregard not only the human dignity of a few, but of us all." A conflicting message, to say the least.

I am a transgender Catholic, and I know many others. We exist, and our community deserves to be treated with the same dignity as everyone else — especially when willful ignorance has prevented the church from acknowledging the diverse reality of gender from those born intersex to the numerous chromosomal variances that exist. In October of last year, I met Pope Francis and told him that I'm a transgender man. If he could receive me with kindness, love and support, then so too could the United States bishops.

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Transgender people are not new. Throughout history, many cultures have recognized a "third gender" or someone existing outside of the traditional understanding of male and female, including in South Asia, Mexico and Hawaii. The Galli of ancient Rome were transgender priestesses who served the goddess Cybele. In ancient Mesopotamia, the priests of Inanna were known for their androgyny and blurring of the gender binary. We have always been here; and, sadly, we have often faced violence from men in power.

Even while facing seemingly insurmountable challenges like these, in the form of barriers built and walls erected as power seeks to consolidate itself in new and terrifying ways, there is a thread that connects all marginalized people across time and space. And so we must weave this thread of solidarity into a tapestry of resiliency, of found family, of mutual aid and social action, much like those who came before us.

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This thread of solidarity was carried by lesbians during the early days of the AIDS crisis who ran bingo hall fundraisers, organized blood drives and volunteered their time and labor to care for HIV-positive gay men. After Proposition 8 was passed in 2008, which abolished same-sex marriage in California, "Gay For Good" was founded to bring people together through acts of service. After the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting, "Gays Against Guns" was formed as a direct response to the gun violence that disproportionately affects LGBTQ communities.

In Catholic spaces, the call for LGBTQ inclusion has been a decades-long one, sustained by those who believe all should be welcome in God's house. DignityUSA, New Ways Ministry and, in recent years, Outreach, have done this good work alongside others.

The LGBTQ community is built on the foundation of love, support and respect — Gospel values through and through. In this time of renewed threat to transgender people, we all have a part to play in standing up for one another, supporting the most vulnerable and speaking truth to power.

Trans Catholics like me are ready to lead the way.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.