Vatican

Vatican News



Some of the hundreds of LGBTQ+ Catholics and their families who joined a Holy Year pilgrimage to Rome walk through the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Sept. 6, 2025. (AP/Andrew Medichini)



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The Vatican released a report on Tuesday (May 5) that included the testimony of two married gay Catholics and acknowledged the church's role in "the solitude, anguish, and stigma that accompany persons with same-sex attractions and their families." The report also reflects on the negative impacts of conversion therapy, or "the devastating effects of reparative therapies aimed at recovering heterosexuality."

" It's a big deal because they included testimonies and published testimonies from two LGBTQ people, both of them married, which is also unusual for the Vatican to do," said Fr. James Martin, a founder of Outreach, an LGBTQ Catholic ministry. "As far as I know, it's the first time that in any official publication of the Vatican, they've included witnesses and testimonies and stories from LGBTQ Catholics in any kind of detailed way."

The report comes from a group of theologians, including bishops, priests, a sister and a layperson, convened by the Vatican to study "controversial" issues raised by the Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis' signature listening initiative, to which Martin was a delegate. Though church reform advocates hoped — and traditionalists feared — that the synod would bring major changes to church teaching around gender and sexuality, the decision to relegate contentious issues, such as LGBTQ+ inclusion, to study groups instead of general discussion was widely seen as a damper.

As expected, the synod study group report does not announce major changes to church doctrine, but it does suggest that the Catholic Church address the impasse

between "doctrinal firmness" and "pastoral welcome" by listening and using a transdisciplinary approach, such as incorporating insights from psychology, alongside the Bible and church doctrine.

" It's a really good — I would even say historic — document," said Yunuen Trujillo, a lesbian lay minister from Los Angeles. " It's still calling for all Catholics to engage in a process of discernment that is respectful of people's lived experiences."

Trujillo, author of "LGBTQ Catholics: A Guide to Inclusive Ministry," said it might take a while for LGBTQ+ Catholics in the pews to feel the impact and noted that the document only focuses on lesbians, gays and bisexual people. "But I do believe it would be a positive impact, not a negative one," she said.

Marianne Duddy-Burke, a married lesbian Catholic and DignityUSA's executive director, said, " The most significant thing for me was the recognition that top-down trying to dictate behavior and morality on the basis of dogma isn't working," adding she was "hopeful" to see the report using the language of a "paradigm shift."

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The "paradigm shift" the report proposes is a move away from applying abstract theological principles to on-the-ground realities and instead seeing theory and practice as a "virtuous cycle." For the two to effectively inform each other, the report argues, requires a focus on relationships, transparency and learning. The document offers this theological framework not just for LGBTQ+ issues but for broader use, including in nonviolent activism and protest.

Though synod documents are not written by the pope, but by the study group, they require the authorization of the pope to be released to the public.

The report's release garnered some blowback, a portion of which fell on Pope Leo XIV. Far-right Catholic news organization LifeSite published a story on the report, raising concerns that the report was questioning "the sinful nature of homosexuality" and leaving unresolved the "debate on same-sex 'marriage.'" Co-founder John-Henry Westen released a video warning that the report's pro-LGBTQ+ stance makes clear the meaning of "synodality" under Leo.

Advocates for LGBTQ+ Catholics expressed surprise to see the Vatican publishing the testimonies of married gay men.

" I was expecting a rather bland report. And this was not that," said Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry, which serves LGBTQ Catholics. " In days gone by in the church, they would try to tick off the token box by getting someone who had certain traits and characteristics, but who was just not critical of the church in any way," DeBernardo said.

Martin also said that this is the first time he remembers seeing conversion therapy "critiqued that strongly" in a Vatican document. "There have been certain bishops who have been very muted in their critique of conversion therapy, but then there have also been bishops who have used organizations whose techniques really verge on conversion therapy," he said.

One gay Catholic wrote of "wounds from the Christian community" in his Vatican-released testimony. "I cannot ignore the scars I carry. I have witnessed the devastating effects of 'conversion therapies' and the break-up of families, which felt like an attack on God's sensitive and blameless creation. These experiences deeply hurt, because they target the inherent dignity of a person who simply bears the love of another of the same gender."

But the married Portuguese man also wrote of his deep faith in the Eucharist and his sharing "a life of faith, service, and love" with his husband. "I live my life in profound peace with God, who knows me from my mother's womb."

"I feel the Church needs to move beyond mere 'welcoming' and 'pity,'" he wrote in the testimony. "We need to proclaim the unspoken truth: God loves you and desires your wholeness. Sexuality is one part of our life, and difference is a hallmark of Creation."

DeBernardo said the testimonies of LGBTQ+ people and their advocates have also been moving for the 17 bishops who have participated in three different meetings with New Ways Ministry in recent years. "We had a bishop at the end of the meeting in tears because he was so regretful of the way he had thought about LGBTQ people," DeBernardo said.

"Dialogue really is the first step," said DeBernardo. " The genius of Pope Francis is that he realized that people had to start talking with one another, and learning about

each other and not having the fear and the stereotypes."

For Duddy-Burke, after years of struggling to even have these conversations because she represents a grassroots group led by LGBTQ+ Catholics, including a ban on her group meeting in Catholic spaces dating back to 1986, the document inspires hope: "We didn't have a place at the table and, and this document says that it's time that we did," she said.

At the same time, Duddy-Burke worries if those who hold the power will continue to dialogue and be willing to have their "minds and hearts changed."

"And how will that be managed in parts of the world where it's absolutely unsafe and it's sometimes illegal, you know, for people to come forward as queer?" she asked.

The synod report also addresses "active nonviolence," highlighting the examples of Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Filipino "People Power" and Polish "Solidarity" anti-government movements, as well as the experience of a Catholic Serbian conscientious objector. Peace has been a major focus of Leo's pontificate, and his recent anti-war statements have led to conflict with the Trump administration, which has used theological language to promote its war in the Middle East.

In the Vatican report, the theologians suggest that "just war theory," which Catholic U.S. Vice President JD Vance has referenced to defend the war, is "inadequate" in the modern context. "Since war can no longer be confined to military targets but overflows into civilian life, taking on new forms (hybrid, asymmetrical, etc.), the recourse to frameworks used in the past for legitimate defence — and even more so for 'just war' — appears increasingly inadequate," they write.