

Rainbow Pilgrims of Faith



# RECONCILIATION FROM THE MARGINS



Personal Stories of Queer  
Persons of Faith

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# FOREWORD

We welcome this contribution to the sharing of costly experiences and reflections in the ecumenical family. It collects important stories of LGBTIQ+ persons of faith from all over the world. In this way, it contributes to the understanding of human diversity and widens the horizon of human experience, to which churches and other religious institutions need to relate more seriously. What the diversity of creation implies and what it means to be a human being, created in the image of God, are continuous learning processes for the churches.



As many of the collected stories confirm, the ecumenical family has a long way to walk when it comes to the protection of human rights and human dignity of LGBTIQ+ persons. No matter how we understand human identity and sexuality theologically, any person should feel safe and welcome in their family, society, and faith community. Unfortunately, this is not the case today. A few weeks ago, Oslo was hit by terror the night before the annual Pride parade. Many queer persons feel insecure – even in liberal states such as Norway. As long as hatred and intolerance continue to violate and limit the lives of LGBTIQ+ persons, churches cannot rest.

Through ‘Mission from the margins,’ the ecumenical movement has emphasized that mission is not something done by the powerful to the powerless, by the rich to the poor, or by the privileged to the marginalized. In a similar way, this project of ‘Reconciliation from the margins’ not only describes the significance of the healing of relationships between excluded LGBTIQ+ persons and their families. It also underscores how essential this reconciliation is for the wider community and the churches. The way society and faith communities treat LGBTIQ+ persons displays important aspects of their compassionate and humanitarian quality.

Oslo, July 2022

Rt Revd Olav Fykse Tveit  
Presiding Bishop Church of Norway

# Kerstin Söderblom

## QUEERING THEOLOGY



Queer people read the Bible and theological texts with queer eyes. They relate biblical stories to their live stories and vice versa. And they do theology with a queer heart and a queer mind and no longer apologize. That’s actually what all people do. Doing theology is a very personal and contextual thing. It is bound to time and space and is never an objective endeavour. It seems, however, to be a big problem when queer people do so. Traditional theologians and churches condemn such action as biased or not correct.

The problem: over centuries, people listened to the male voices of scholars and professors, priests and bishops, who defended a male-dominated and hetero-normative framework of biblical hermeneutics and theological interpretation. And they all had been extremely keen on telling people of *how* to live and *whom* to love.

That’s why it is so important to listen to queer people of faith today. Their voices have not been heard much. Take queer people’s experiences seriously and you will be exposed to expert knowledge from the margins. You will learn from people who try to bridge the so-called impossible: being queer and being religious.

The authors of the testimonies that are gathered in this brochure tell unique stories about how each and every one of them tries to reconcile a personal search for a spiritual home with being queer. At the same time most of them are at odds with their prevailing culture and religious context. By telling their stories they widen hearts and horizons. In other words: They offer transformative energy to religious communities that are in danger of alienating themselves from daily lives as they build up walls and defend traditional values against anything and anyone who seems to be different.

Over decades queer people have struggled to reclaim the term “queer.” Originally, it was a swear word used to ridicule and discriminate against lesbians, gays,

bisexuals, trans and inter (LGBTI+) people. In the eighties and nineties of the 20th century, however, they started to transform the pejorative term into a meaningful resource. Since then, the term queer serves as a proud self-description for all those who either do not fit into heteronormative categories of sexuality or binary gender identities.

In this sense, the authors of this brochure are subjects of queer theological work in progress. Their testimonies reflect the daily lives of people who, because of their non-heteronormative sexual orientation or non-binary gender identity, have experienced mockery, hatred, physical or psychological violence or exclusion, very often performed in religious communities – with the Bible in their hands. Queer people of faith embody critical approaches to oppressive sources of theology and search for respect and radical inclusion.

The colourful variety of testimonies question so called self-evident concepts of sexuality and gender identities, and cross boundaries and norms. They “queer” it, as some scholars say, and open up for new biographical and theological horizons.

## QUEERING BIBLICAL TEXTS

Queer approaches to biblical hermeneutics do not any longer defensively justify sexual diversity and diverse gender identities, but assume them as given. All belong to God’s creation and all is wonderfully made. With regard to the biblical findings, in the centre of debate are no longer the few verses about homosexuality, the so called “clobber texts” – those biblical verses that are used to oppose homosexuality (Lev. 18:22; Lev. 20:13; Deut. 23:17; Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; and 1 Tim. 1:9-10). These texts were predominantly written to distinguish specific religious convictions from ancient Canaan and/or Graeco-Roman contexts of cult prostitution, paedophilia, and homosexual contacts between married men. Biblical scholars do not regard those few biblical verses as meaningful to LGBTI+ life contexts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The basic biblical message is this: Every single person is regarded as a unique image of God (cf. Gen. 1:27). It guarantees the dignity of all people – regardless of their origin, colour of skin, age, physical ability, gender identity and sexual orientation. In addition, people with their diverse sexualities and gender identities are equally included into the “Double Commandment of Love” (Mark 12:29; Matt. 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28). The commandment to love God, and one’s neighbour as one should love oneself does not differentiate between individual persons. Instead, everybody should love God, and respect other people, just as much as everybody deserves respect and recognition by others.

In addition, the search for non-heteronormative traces in biblical stories is an important part of queering biblical texts. Non-binary images of God are uncovered. And biblical figures are identified, that can be read and understood beyond heteronormative categories and beyond binary gender identities.

For this purpose, heteronormative exegetical traditions are revealed, and other possible interpretations are presented. Research into socio-political, historical, cultural, and linguistic hermeneutical traditions are undertaken. Queer scholars use literary gaps and empty spaces to point out different meanings and interpretation of biblical texts. Reading between the lines and critical re-lectures are promoted in order to include queer perspectives.

Furthermore, queer theological research demands that dimensions of homophobia and trans hostility will be linked to other dimensions of injustice, such as racism, sexism, antisemitism, colonialism, ageism and anti-disability. Such multi-systemic analysis is necessary in order to be able to adequately describe power and inequality structures in churches and religious communities, that affect people’s lives.

The authors of this brochure contribute their specific views to this complex texture by telling their queer stories. They talk about doubt and faith, hopes and fears. And all of it is interconnected with other issues, like different continents, nationalities, colour of skin, cultural and socio-political contexts, and various religious denominations. If the readers listen carefully they can learn from their voices of how to survive in hostile surroundings, and how to shape societies and religious communities in an affirming and inclusive way for all.

# Martin Franke- Coulbeaut

## LIBERATING IDENTITY Reading the Bible & One's Life



Discovering the diversity of daily lives in the Bible is collectively as well as individually an important instrument of liberation from victimhood. The binary and heterosexual norm of mainstream society (“a person is only either a woman or a man” as well as “sex is only appropriate between opposite-sex individuals”) means that members of queer minorities need a conscious decision to find their own identity.

Many of the testimonies of LGBTI+ believers presented in this brochure show that these identities often have to be developed against the confirmed messages of their own faith communities: Kasha Jacqueline Nabagasera writes of “misinterpreting the doctrine” that excludes lesbians in Uganda. From China, Eros Shaw and Joseph Yang report that they first had to support each other in Rainbow Communities in order to be able to live their faith as gays. Feeling alone with one's identity is one of the biggest obstacles on the path of coming out.

Bisexuals like Bell and Shirley from Hong Kong and Uschi from Poland are usually hit even harder by exclusion than lesbians and gays who have often already found a safe space, at least in more open societies. For trans and inter people like Hendrika Mayora in Papua, Small Luk from Hong Kong and Ivon from Germany there are often even fewer role models for a process of coming out or transition. Their testimonies can be encouraging and helpful for others.

Pauline from Singapore describes that despite inner and outer struggles, faith is also a force for reconciliation with God during coming out: “During that dark time, the one thing that kept me going was a deep knowing in my soul that somehow God loved me and for some reason, God was okay with me, and I was okay with God. Each time I cried out to God, an inexplicable peace and assurance flooded my heart and soul.” In the end, the only thing that has changed is that “I am no longer so fearful of rejection that I cannot speak my truth.”

As well as showing that the process of coming out happens in all cultures all over the world, it is important for us to recognize that not only Christian faith can help with self-acceptance. In interfaith solidarity, Imam Muhsin Hendricks from South Africa has described his experience in Islam, and Max Feldhake as a gay rabbi from the US living in Germany described his experiences in Judaism. We are particularly grateful for their testimonies. And we confirm that, as with all others, the publication of their personal stories is encouraging and empowering for others.

The faith stories collected here can be helpful not only for LGBTI+ people. They also show ways that can strengthen other minority members, and people in general in their process of self-discovery and quest for self-esteem. For ultimately, all people know minority situations in which they themselves need a coming out, a confession that “in this respect I am different.” The Bible offers support for these developments, because it describes completely diverse ways of life in different times, contexts and cultures. It centres around oppressed and marginalized people and is, as Ivon writes, “anti-fundamentalist in itself” through “its deeply dialogic structure.” As in other faith contexts, daily lives and the Bible interpret each other, and become fruitful for diverse sexual minorities and identities.

Certainly, there are also biblical writings in which some people with their gender identities and sexualities are regarded as more valuable than others. But diversity in biblical texts has never disappeared. In all the decisive editions, the lives and hopes of outcasts and underdogs shine through, and keep all people searching for freedom, dignity and respect. The power of hope, and the variety of images of God suggest that God represents diversity. God, cannot be identified with heteronormative gender identities.

We thank all people who dared to tell about their personal story in this brochure. They contribute to visions of hope and reconciliation beyond heteronormative and fundamentalist norms and by that create safe spaces for all.



# Felicia from Ghana

## “I NEVER FOUND PEACE IN THE HOUSE OF MY GRAND- MOTHER”



There has been great struggle when it comes to my sexuality, my faith and my relationship with God. My Sunday school teacher had always made me believe that homosexuality is the greatest sin on earth, and it comes with the greatest punishment among other condemnations. This put so much fear in me as I was growing up, creating what I termed some years back “interpersonal conflict”.

As I grew and realised I had feelings for and was attracted to women, the fear of receiving the greatest punishment put me into a tight corner. I always felt guilty, sitting silently, and when such words from my Sunday school teacher hit me, I became emotionally unstable.

Soon I was confirmed, and joined the main church services. Yet I was never able to take part in any church activities or even take the Holy Communion, because those teachings from the Sunday school were still haunting me. Meanwhile, my feelings and attractions for women kept growing.

I had no option but to avoid attending church services every Sunday, instead going to the beachside or the cape coast castle which was close to my church. So while my parents thought I was at church, I was at the beach waiting patiently till the close of the church service, before joining my family back home. This continued for years.

I later moved to my grandmother's house. I attended fellowship at her church, but it was no different from my previous church: full of hate speech and all sorts of condemnation.

I dropped out of church, and found many excuses to give to my grandmamma, who always seeking to bring up all her family members in a Christian way, to be closer to God.

Things became hard. I saw myself as a sinner, and a black sheep of the family. I was always isolating myself, keeping distance between myself and the other members of the family as they started to suspect my sexuality.

My grandmother would always take me to prayers and ask that I sit in front for the pastor – to see me and cast away the evil that dwelled in me. I received all sorts of deliverance and counselling, but the feelings never changed.

The only prayer I had to recite was a prayer for God to change me and save me from receiving His great punishment.

I never found peace in the house as my grandmother would pour insults on me anytime she sets her eyes on me; all sorts of humiliations. All those living in my area heard about my sexuality, as my grandmother took the chance of shouting every morning at me in an ever-louder voice. No one in the family wanted to associate with me.

My relationship with God was very poor: no church, no praying and no others that could strengthen my relationship with God.

That is, until I joined some LGBT organisations and groups. This has empowered me a bit, and gradually I am hoping to strengthen my faith and relationship with God, even though I haven't joined any church yet because of the possibility that they will put the same fear in me. I have plans to pray without ceasing, and to read my Bible more often and abide by the teaching of the Bible.

## Uchenna from Nigeria



“I NEVER  
THOUGHT THAT  
MY SEXUALITY  
WAS ABNORMAL  
OR UNNATURAL”

I was raised in a strict Roman Catholic Christian home. I was well versed in the knowledge of the catechism. This made me become a candidate for First Holy Communion at the age of nine and a candidate for Faith Confirmation at age 11. In all these years of commitment to the church, I always knew that I was attracted to boys. I was bold and expressed my feelings, but this did not come without a price. Though my personality was embraced by my family and faith community because of my high academic performance, I faced bullying from my immediate peers.

Because of my love for God, liturgical worship and episcopal service, I always felt a divine connectedness. Driven by these compulsions, I joined the Altar Knights in order to serve during liturgical and Eucharistic celebrations. My desire to have a better understanding of the scriptures led me to join the Catholic Charismatic Group. I have always been, and am still working to become a Christian minister.

I never thought that my sexuality was abnormal or unnatural, not until my young adult years when I heard the sermon of Sodom and Gomorrah. The preacher said emphatically how homosexuals would rot in hell. The term homosexual was new to me then. I felt confused at the time and emotionally distressed.

The search for truth and reconciliation of my reality and faith led me to abandon that Episcopal Church and join the Pentecostal church. I was in dire need of a tangible reassurance of God's love and validation of my sexuality, but damnation was all I could get. Even with the little time spent in higher institutions, I tried engaging in opposite-sex relationships – hoping to reverse my sexuality and conform to the traditional view on sexual ethics. But still, my homosexual inclinations were strong. At some point, I had to come out to my girlfriend at the time. Luckily, she was understanding.

My quest for validation and sense of spiritual connectedness led me to join a Christian gospel music ministry in the same year that the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act was signed in Nigeria. This development fuelled an aggressive anti-LGBTI campaign among faith communities, of which the group I joined was actively involved. Because of my passion for gospel songs, I could not leave this group. I endured all the years of prayers against the spirit of homosexuality by this group.

But due to the fact that I understand my sexual orientation to be natural, and with all the efforts I have made to the contrary, I have not been able to reverse my sexuality. I therefore looked out for an organisation that works to promote the human rights of LGBTI persons in Nigeria. I now volunteer as a peer educator, having begun my journey of self-acceptance through various training and seminars.

During my journey of reconciliation, I found out that the love and mercy of God is ever sufficient in my life. The grace of God in my life never diminished at all due to my sexuality. Though the church is slow to accept this reality, I believe that with more dialogue there will eventually be inclusion and affirmation.

# Ecclesia from South Africa



## “TODAY, I AM HAPPILY MARRIED”

**M**y journey to serve God and to reconcile my sexual orientation and gender identity with my spirituality has been a complex one, full of learning, frustration and ultimately of hope and love.

My faith has always been important to me. I was born in Johannesburg, into a Charismatic Christian home. When I came to the conclusion that I am a lesbian, I realised that this discovery would not be acceptable to my family or the church and so I concealed it. I tried to fit in by being in heterosexual relationships.

But it wasn't long before others found out about my sexual orientation. I was told in no uncertain terms that I cannot be Christian and a lesbian. The Church's stance on homosexuality sent a clear message of rejection to me which forced me to leave the Church. The pain and loss were immense.

Several years later I had an encounter with God and I returned to the Church. I knew that God loved and accepted me, and I renewed my commitment. At the time, the only way for me to be included in the community was either to live a life of secrecy or of celibacy. To stop the fear and pain of being rejected, I tried

to conform by attending support groups and going for counselling. I was also part of an ex-gay ministry (for recovering gay people) for several years. However, none of these efforts changed my sexual orientation. To obey the church's teaching, I lived in denial of who I am. I believe that I have been called to the Ordained Ministry of God.

During this period of denial, I stumbled onto the Methodist Church. Here women could be ordained, and I saw my way clear to fulfil my calling to God. It was during these years and specifically at Seminary, with much research, that I discovered and embraced a more inclusive reading and interpretation of scripture. Afresh I realised that “nothing” could separate me from God's love and acceptance. I came to the conclusion that my sin was not homosexuality, but rejecting who God has made me to be.

By God's grace I met someone. No longer able to bear the soul-destroying silence, I announced my intended marriage to the congregation. I was overwhelmed by their support and good wishes. I realised that it is better to be rejected for who I am than to be accepted for who I am not. My wish to marry a person of the same sex led finally to the discontinuation of my ministry in the Methodist Church (MCSA). I decided to take the matter to the courts. This put huge stress on my marriage and we then took the painful decision to end our marriage. The courts however decided that the matter be referred back to the Church.

I have been able to share my journey with my family, which has brought new perspective and healing to our relationship. And the MCSA have changed their policy in October 2020 to be fully inclusive of same-sex couples. Today, I am happily married and lead an organisation called Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) which is a faith-based NGO based in Cape Town, South Africa, founded in 1995.



## Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera from Uganda



### “I CONTINUE TO DO MY SHARE TO FIGHT FOR EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL”

**M**y name is Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera, I was born in Kampala, Uganda on 12 April 1980. I am the first child in a family of two. I am a proud lesbian and a religious person, born of Protestant faith. I have openly lived as a lesbian woman all my life in a country that considers homosexuality illegal and has a maximum penalty of life imprisonment for anyone caught in the act.

I started my activism at a young age during my university days, after getting tired of being expelled from many schools. I was on the verge of being expelled in my final year at the university because of my openness. Having been open about my sexuality led me to many unforgettable situations, including being physically, verbally and religiously harassed. I stopped going to church at some point in my life because of the hatred that was being preached in churches. There was so much hate spread around the country by religious leaders of all denominations, it made me detest anything to do with religion.

Then I had to reconcile my faith and sexuality because I realised that this was a very big hurdle in my activism. Running away from the oppressors was never a wise strategy. I realised I needed to engage with religious leaders in order for them to understand us and stop misinterpreting the doctrine. Uganda is a very religious country and so many people follow everything that religious leaders say, and I saw that as a very big obstacle to achieve the freedoms and equality I was fighting for.

Over the years, I have slowly started going back to church. Although not as much as I would like, it's a good starting point to find my way back to exercising my faith. We have also seen a few religious leaders who have come out openly to condemn the discrimination towards the LGBT\* community. They have also faced great difficulty for standing up, just like any other person who dares speak out in support of the LGBT\* community.

On a good note, we have now opened up our LGBT\*-friendly worship places where community members go for counselling to reconcile their faith and sexuality. We have also started talks with a few prominent religious leaders, though these are slow and underground which doesn't really help our cause.

Having prominent religious leaders like the former Rev. Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu from South Africa speak out in favour of us gives great prominence to a just cause. So if we can have many like him on the continent it would really help. I continue to do my share to fight for equal rights for all, and for full inclusion in religious and social communities. And it feels good to know that I am not alone.

# Rev. Dr. Ana Ester Pádua Freire from Brazil



## “NOTHING MAKES SENSE IF WE DO NOT TOUCH PEOPLE’S HEARTS AND BODIES” – GOD POETRY

This is a text-confession. I confess here my love for God, for his revelation in Jesus Christ and for his revelation in life. I write as a lesbian cleric and as a queer theologian who has reconciled faith with sexuality, body with desire.

Before I decided to study theology, I spent a long time away from God. God hurt. It was only after a painful end of a romantic relationship that I decided to go back to church. But which church? I had been cast out of my former congregation because of my sexuality. I had been a member of a neo-Pentecostal community, living the lie of being an ex-lesbian. But living this lie took away my sanity. Literally. My lesbianism came out through my very pores. How could I leave the wholeness of my body outside the church door? How could I accept entering the temple castrated? I didn’t deserve that. The idea of church, community and God made me very afraid. But something in me missed God. I longed for God.

Yes, I missed God and I must confess, I missed the Bible. The period that I was in this church, being disciplined by a mentor, I had developed a profound relationship with the Bible and God. But how could I open this book that condemned me—this book that had removed me from my community of faith, from the pastor I loved so much, from my ministerial dreams? How could I spend time reading condemnation, eternal death, doomsday, when the only thing I wanted was to find affection and acceptance?

During this period, to maintain my sanity, I did not read the biblical text. But I ended up discovering other sacred texts. These texts became sacred to me and in me. The texts revealed God to me. Rubem Alves, in all his wisdom, said, “it has been a while that, to think about God, I have not read the theologians, but I have read the poets.” And poetry saved me! Every time I read some poetry, it was as if I was meeting the gospel of Jesus—narratives of an overwhelming love. Longing does these things. It allows an absence to become a presence in the midst of the simplest things—a wind that kisses the face, a flower that is not afraid to bloom, a poetry that numbs anxiety. For a long time, when I opened my mouth to say God, I said “longing,” but I also learned to say “poetry.”

The Brazilian poet Cora Coralina said: “I don’t know if life is too short or too long for us, but I know that nothing we endure makes sense if we don’t touch people’s hearts.” And I dare to add, nothing that we endure makes sense if we do not touch people’s bodies. Because in the reconciliation between faith and desire, only the touch of the recognition of the other’s body, the other’s incarnation, can reveal the divine presence of God.

FROM BRAZIL

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## Noah Brown from Canada

### “I SHARED EYE-OPENING CONVERSATIONS WITH CHURCHGOERS” – TAPESTRY ART AS RECONCILING BRIDGE



In the summer of 2017, I began to produce a large body of work, deconstructing my experiences as a queer Black person in my adolescence. My realized queerness was new, and the burden of intergenerational trauma constantly presented itself in my day-to-day life.

Earlier that year, I was on the bus when two Black boys screamed homophobic remarks at me and laughed as they picked apart my every feature. The most troublesome aspect of the experience was that they looked like me. I couldn't fathom the idea that we share the same historical background, yet they were projecting these hurtful slurs to publicly humiliate a human they had never met before. At

the time, I hadn't even come to terms with my sexuality yet, and in retrospect, I now realize they saw something in me that I didn't know about myself.

I bottled up much anger from this experience, so I chose to concentrate these thoughts on my art. This collection consisted of a series of tapestries, porcelain sculptures, industrially designed products, and photography. A 1.2 x 4.8-metre tapestry recreation of the Brookes Slave Ship model posed my biggest obstacle in completing my collection. I planned to dry-felt the entire tapestry at my school, but the building was closed for repairs.

I sought a large creative space. My mom came across the Roncesvalles United Church in Toronto. Rev. Anne Hines listened and welcomed me into her community with open arms. She brought me to the church's basement. The room had high ceilings, a children's theatre, and markings on the floor that appeared to be remnants of a vintage gymnasium. It was the perfect studio space.

Over the course of my stay, I shared eye-opening conversations with churchgoers. I noticed the church housed several programs such as healing centres, a global medicine charity, and a soup kitchen – all of which impacted my neighborhood and beyond. The space felt safe and I began to develop a special relationship with the church community. One day Rev. Hines came down to pay me a visit in the church basement and asked if I would be interested in speaking at the next service. I was exhilarated at the thought of sharing my process and speaking about my journey.

When the day came, the service began with members of the community carrying my tapestry down the aisle to be presented before the seated churchgoers. Rev. Hines provided a compassionate introduction to my work and why the art I produced was important to the church. I then spoke to an attentive, predominantly White audience. They showed curiosity and asked questions about my experiences as a queer Black person. The people brought understanding, humility, and willingness to question their own past actions.

The most memorable moment of this experience were my discussions after the service with older queer members of the audience. We spoke of their experiences coming to terms with their identity and their tribulations maturing in homophobic environments. These discussions helped me understand my own traumatic experiences, and how experiences constantly repeat themselves.

*FROM CANADA*

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# Fabio Meneses from Colombia



## “THE CHURCH DID NOT CURE ME FROM BEING GAY”

I was born in Bogotá in 1980. I now work in a public library as a promoter of reading. My childhood and adolescence took place together with my family in a well-known Colombian Pentecostal church, and later I attended other neo-Pentecostal churches. From the time I could think for myself, I liked men. Because in those churches I was taught that homosexuality was a terrible sin, for many years I repressed that attraction and also tried to change it. Obviously, I did not succeed in doing so.

To achieve that change, I followed each teaching that promised to cure me of homosexuality. Among those teachings were traditional spiritual disciplines such as fasting, prayer, and memorization of Bible verses, along with various pseudo-scientific therapies.

Additionally, I was part of a Christian support group (based on the methodology of a ministry for “ex-gays” in the United States) where we were taught that we must learn to live with same-sex attraction as if it were a sort of illness. We were told that we would never stop feeling attraction for men, but that we must learn to control it. On one occasion, I had a sexual encounter with another participant in the group and because of that situation, I was removed from my position. They demanded that I make a public apology in front of the other leaders. This experience of public shaming was what moved me to leave the group.

The absence of results, despite my effort throughout all of those years, produced in me a great sense of guilt, sadness and bitterness, including suicidal thoughts. I could have ended up like the main character in the film *Prayers for Bobby*, but thanks to divine intervention, I found another way out of the storm in which I lived. In October 2013, while at work, at the age of 33, I decided to accept what was undeniable and I recognized myself as gay. In August 2014, I came out of the closet publicly in an article shared on Facebook with my family, friends and others who knew me, and I told my parents. My parents did not receive my coming out of the closet well. They had known of my attempts to change, and saw my coming out as a surrender. To this date, they continue not accepting my sexual orientation.

After coming out, I decided not to return to the church. I did not want to be in an institution that condemned what I was, but after two years, I felt the need to gather with others. I looked for an inclusive church. At first, I did not find one, but I discovered an inter-religious group for LGBTI people that I began to attend. There, I met my partner and he invited me to the Colombian Methodist Church in Bogotá that was in a process of inclusion of sexually diverse believers. Later, my partner Jhon Botía Miranda was named pastor of the church. He continues in that position and I am now a deacon.

Today I can say without any doubt or fear that I am completely happy as gay and Christian. God does not condemn God's LGBTI children, and moreover, I believe that those who decide to accept themselves as Christians in their diverse sexual and gender identities will experience the same freedom and joy that God has given to me to enjoy.



# All-in Saltillo from Mexico



## STORY ON BEHALF OF ALL-IN SALTILLO COMMUNITY

*I te Inflammate Omnia* is the slogan of All-in Saltillo, a community of young LGBT+ Catholics from the North of Mexico. It means “go and bring light to everyone and everything. We have adopted this Jesuit phrase not as a cry of war to impose, but as a God’s love song to unity.

We discovered that young people are more likely to be convinced of thoughts like: “God dislikes homosexuals” and others that are similar. Enlightened by God’s Infinite Love and Goodness, we saw the opportunity to create a community that disproves those kinds of ideas.

Gradually, the group started to grow under the pillars of Faith, Community, Formation and Service with people who represent diverse letters of the LGBT+ community, though it’s important to point out that in our group the personal identity of each member is not most important; the main identity we recognize is humans loved by God, so everyone interested in entering the group will be welcomed. In this way, we opened a door that has been closed by exclusion and ignorance.

The truth is we finally understood that God’s Love is never-ending, in it, we united first as a community, then we joined the Red Católica Arcoiris (Catholic Rainbow Network) Mexico, in which we are the newest member. We participate in masses, conferences, and exercises in which we live God’s love.

In our meetings, we have a moment of prayer in which we thank the Lord for the blessings we have received and for allowing us to demonstrate that our sexuality is not in a struggle with our religion. We also have a time that we call “sharing life” in which we talk about our problems and feelings. It is really amazing to admire God’s presence in these moments, sharing laughs and tears and feedback to us.

And so, All-in has become a family, and the struggle has not ended. We shall keep trying to make those persons that have become separated from the Church due to mistaken comments, to see that God loves us all, whether white or black, tall or small, fat or thin, straight or gay, and try to revive the line from St. John’s Gospel that says, “As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.” (John 15:9-12). The world does not need more violence, hate, exclusion and division. It needs love. If we can contribute to reviving faith in God’s love, we should do so and share light on all with God’s Love.



# June Barrett from the USA

## CHRISTIAN, QUEER AND IMMIGRANT



**I** am a 57-year-old, queer Jamaican immigrant and labour rights activist living in the United States.

My mother died shortly after I was born. My aunt who raised me would not go to church but she made sure that I did. As a little girl I fell in love with my Baptist church. It was there that I first heard the word love, a word that I never heard in my home. The church became my rock; the hymns gave me peace when I was afraid.

As a teenager, I knew I was attracted to the same sex but I kept silent. I was afraid that I would have to walk away from church and become an outcast.

I had no one to turn to because homosexuality is a taboo in Jamaica. I sometimes overheard women in my village gossiping about who was a sodomite or a batty man and that they would all go to hell.

In my early twenties, I sought counselling from one of the elders in my church. I told her about my sexual identity and she told me that I should seek repentance for my sins. I was prayed for at my church, lying on the floor while they tried to cast out the homosexual demons out of me. I was hurt, confused, and a feeling of isolation set in.

I continued to attend church every Sunday, and was involved in the women's group and bible study. I formed a bond with one of my church sisters. I was in love with her. When I finally told her, she told me that my feeling for her was abnormal. She

didn't stop being friends with me but she constantly reminded me that I would be going to hell. I finally stopped going to church because it was rumoured that my friend and I were lovers.

In October of 1994, a glimmer of hope came when Dr. Bärbel Wartenburg-Potter invited me to attend the international lesbian conference in Bad Boll, Germany. It was there that I met other lesbian Christians. I didn't even know that you could be queer and a pastor at the same time! My life was forever changed. We also went to Gelnhausen, where we further shared our experiences, built alliances, and strategized ways to support each other when we returned to our countries. I returned to Jamaica feeling empowered and the letters I received from many of the women I met at Boll kept me sane and connected for many years.

In 1998 the Jamaica Forum For Lesbian, All-Sexual, and Gays (J-FLAG) was founded. We welcomed J-FLAG because we had no safety net, but now we had an organization that would help protect our human rights.

In 2001 I came out to a friend who promised not to share my secret with anyone, but she outed me at my workplace! I had to leave Jamaica and on 21 December 2001, I arrived in the US. Living here has many challenges—homophobia, transphobia and racism are rampant—but I feel safer than I did in Jamaica. I am a member of a Baptist church that welcomes everyone.

As a labour organizer, I always carry my immigrant, queer and Christian identity with me because I cannot separate myself from any of them. I often tell young queer Christians that it's okay to be both, and not to buy into a false narrative about God who cannot accept a queer person or that you are possessed by the devil.

*FROM THE USA*

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# Eros Shaw from China, Mainland

“WHEN WILL  
THE TIME  
COME WHEN  
THE CHURCH  
GENUINELY  
EMBRACES ALL  
THESE YOUNG  
PEOPLE?”



**I**n high school, at the age of 13, I fell in love with another man for the first time. Later I moved to work in Beijing in 2009 and attended a sharing session organised by Rev. Ngeo Boon Lin. He is an ordained minister under the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in the US with a great influence among Chinese gay Christians. After the session, gay Christians from various denominations gathered in a bar. I was the only Catholic that day.

We decided to name our group the China Rainbow Witness Fellowship (CRWF) as the rainbow was the sign of God’s covenant with humanity,

and the rainbow is also one sign of gay pride. What we shared ranged from the Bible, theology, ecumenism and Church history to psychological development and AIDS prevention. In July 2013, Brother Xiao Bei, a seminarian, established a QQ chat group to gather gay Catholics, the China Catholic Rainbow Community (CCRC).

During this time, I invited my best friend to a fellowship Christmas party. When people mentioned the word “gay”, she cried out, “You can’t possibly be gay.” That hurt me deeply. We did not talk about this topic for a long time, but she occasionally found articles to show me, hoping I could change my sexual orientation. But as she went deeper into the fellowship, she accepted these gay Christians, including my boyfriend, and even saw our relationship as enviable. Perhaps she is the most meaningful person in my coming-out story. She is a straight person, and she could not understand us until she personally contacted such a group.

One year, photos of a fellowship Christmas celebration in Shanghai were circulated widely by a critical group from the Church. They attacked us in an extreme manner. Hoping to stop the dispute, we left the parish. So the first large-scale reception of gay Christians by the Catholic Church in China came to an end after barely four months.

The continued existence of the CCRC has been a consolation. We also have a catechumen class and a Rosary prayer group. These allow gay Catholics who are puzzled to share their experiences. There are a few priests, seminarians and religious sisters who are not afraid of the pressure and voluntarily stay with this community.

I represented the CRWF and the CCRC in the founding conference of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics (GNRC) in Rome 2015. I was elected to be a member of the steering committee for youth affairs. We have a dialogue with Vatican officials and also pass the messages of Chinese gay Catholics to the whole world. I am moved by the faith of the gay Catholics who have a great love for Our Lady. When will the time come when our Holy Mother the Church genuinely embraces all these young people? I am grateful to have edited the book *May Your Lips Kiss Mine — Chinese Tongzhi (LGBT+) Catholics Tales*. I got a lot of positive feedback. I hope that the Church will one day fully accept homosexuality: We will not stop our mission even if there are repeated frustrations.

## Joseph Yang from China, Mainland



# “MY CALLING TO GOD’S MISSION IN SUPPORTING GAY CHRISTIANS STRUGGLING WITH THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION”

I grew up in a traditional Christian family in Xiamen, Fujian Province, China, which followed the Presbyterian tradition. In 1998, I was baptized in a house church named Xiamen Xunsiding Church, where I used to join Bible study with my grandfather during my childhood. My parents dedicated me to God when I was a baby. One day I accidentally fell from my father’s arms and passed out. Not knowing what to do, my parents pleaded with God and promised to dedicate me to the Lord if I survived. My father kept this secret from me until my mother passed away in 2002 from a traffic accident.

After graduating from vocational high school I worked at the Bank of China. However, my life could only be described as comfortable but lacking passion. I received a sign from God to call me into the full ministry. I was still in the closet while studying theology at Theology Centre for Asia in Singapore (TCA). I was greatly encouraged by Rev. Ngo Boon Lin, a Chinese Malaysian gay pastor who came out in the same year. Gradually, I learned to embrace myself and my sexuality.

I studied Theology in Singapore and Hong Kong for seven years; it was at Divinity School of Chung Chi that I started my research on the challenges faced by gay Christian community in Mainland China. After I graduated, I began as a fulltime unpaid pastor and served a sexual minority group in mainland China for eight years.

In 2010, I launched the first QQ (a live chat social media platform popular in China) live chatting group on the internet (now known as CTK public chatting group). By the end of 2011, over 400 people had joined the group. I felt the call to continue and expand my ministry to Chinese Christians struggling with their sexual orientation.

2012 became a milestone for me. Together with some gay Christians in Xiamen, I helped set up Xiamen CTK Fellowship, the first of its kind led by a gay pastor in China. It was time to stand together with other gay Christians to encourage and affirm each other. I was also actively engaged in online prayer networks, conversations and dialogues through online forums dedicated to LGBT Christians in Mainland China.

In 2019, I prayed to God to prepare me for a deeper training to serve gay Christians in the Mainland after my sabbatical year. I set up the following three goals for myself: First, I hope to explore the topic of ministry to LGBT Christians from an evangelical perspective. Second, I hope to undertake an in-depth study in church planting and relational ministry for the purpose of more effective ministry to LGBT Christians in China. Lastly, I will continue to explore queer theology and broaden my spiritual horizon for future theological education of mainland China.

Coming to terms with my sexuality is not easy. Beyond my imagination, in light of my own experience, I will continue to envision my calling to God’s mission in supporting gay Chinese Christians struggling with their sexual orientation.

# Shirley and Bell from Hong Kong



## “THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE”

“If you were not a woman, I would not have loved you; But because you are a woman, I cannot love you.”

We are a female bisexual couple born and raised in Hong Kong, a semi-westernised and highly patriarchal Chinese city. Our story began 25 years ago in a female dormitory where sex was a taboo, sexual orientation was unheard of and same-sex relationships were heavily frowned upon. Two months after we first dated, I succumbed to the surmounting social and religious pressure. Eleven years elapsed before we met again at a concert held in celebration of our dormitory. In that little room, seeing her playing the piano on stage, I suddenly felt as if two spotlights shone one on each of us. I could no longer lie to myself and wrote the above lines to her. Thanks to my belated honesty and her daring spirit, our truncated love was resurrected.

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SHIRLEY AND BELL

We soon learned that bisexuality was branded as “promiscuous” by the LGBT but conservative Christian community we tried to find refuge in, so we retreated into a “safer” identity of a lesbian couple and played into the expected roles of butch and femme, which was not authentic for us and contradicted our longing for a relationship of equals. At the bottom of such gender role-playing lies insecurity, fear and self-doubt. But these traits only sow self-perpetuating and self-fulfilling seeds which suffocate and strangle a relationship. For LGBT couples dealing with families and/or most churches hurling curses at them, as well as no role models or professional bodies to seek advice from, it could have been an impossible uphill battle. Fortunately, we ran into a few friendly counsellors and, after a few years, we were able to unlock our authentic selves.

Life for a bisexual couple is doubly challenging. Ridding ourselves of gender roles was not enough to live our true selves. While we had embraced others’ relationships, we held ourselves against a different, more “moralistic” “standard”. This internal hypocrisy and “sudden” realisation of our true orientation drove us both deeper into self-hatred. After a period of internal struggle, we gathered enough courage to open up to each other and find out that we had been battling with the same issue. With this reconciliation, we walked out of depression into a stronger, more grounded relationship.

It is here that we explore, experiment and experience our own sexualities, identities, expectations and the transcending power of love. Through our 25 years of acquaintance and 13 years of committed relationship, we have battled with our faith, the concept of marriage, our conservative yet loving families, and a gay-dominated faith community. We are now married as a bi-/pansexual Christian couple. Life continues to be challenging: it is best understood backwards, yet one must live it forwards. When it calls for difficult decisions to be made, choose authenticity, honesty, and truth. Such choice lets us experience Jesus’s teaching first-hand: “the truth will set you free”.

FROM HONG KONG

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## Small Luk from Hong Kong

“YOU TAKE  
CARE OF MY  
INTERSEX  
CHILDREN!”



I am Small Luk, an intersex person born in Hong Kong, known for being the first Hong Kong native to publicly acknowledge my intersex status. When I was born as what doctors termed an “ambiguous sex” baby, they determined me as male with a disorder of my genital. My family decided on my sex also because I was the first born in my family and being male is very important for a Chinese family.

I suffered from over twenty genital reconstructive surgeries from eight to thirteen years old. It was a painful experience in my childhood. I refused another surgery at thirteen years old; subsequently they found the uterus and vagina inside my body, but underdeveloped. However, I removed all my male parts to avoid the risk of cancer at the recommendation of doctor, and that was another difficult surgery again. Now I am living as a female intersex woman.

I received Jesus while staying in the hospital. After the genital surgery I felt so painful, sad and helpless. A pastor prayed with me beside my bed in the ward and he gave me a bible. I read the New Testament at night whenever I was woken up by severe pain. I found that Jesus is a great Lord. He gave up his life for our salvation so that we have the chance to go to heaven. I prayed to Jesus and offered my life to him.

I finished the surgery of removing all my male parts in 2010 and I heard God’s voice when I was in Japan. When I saw the blooming cherry blossom, the voice said, “Here is a flower that begins to bloom, I need someone to start my work”. God said, “You take care of my children”. I asked God who are these children and God replied, “My intersex children”. At first I refused God’s calling, the thought of losing everything if people know I am Intersex frightened me! On an early morning in March 2011, one year after I heard God’s voice, I heard the calling again and heard the intersex babies crying in my dream. I felt sad that genital reconstructive surgery continues to be practiced on intersex children. I went up to the highest mountain to affirm God’s calling. I said to God: “Give me a very beautiful sunset view on a cloudy day as a sign from you!” Amazingly, I saw a very beautiful sunset when I arrived at the top of the mountain. I knelt down, “Yes God, I am here, please use me to achieve your work!”

There has been progress due to the advocacy works in Hong Kong and Asia for intersex people. India and Taiwan have banned the genital reconstructive surgery to intersex children under 12 years old. Societies and governments are more aware of the needs of intersex people. I still work hard to raise public awareness, promote intersex rights and advocate for an end to forced genital surgery. However, some conservative Christian groups still say that intersex people are the result of human sin.

We still have a long way to go to achieve God’s work for protection and rights of intersex people. We need your prayer and your blessing.

*FROM HONG KONG*



# Arisdo Gonzalez from Indonesia



## “LOOK AT YOURSELF AND SEE GOD IN YOU.” – MY PILGRIMAGE

**M**y pilgrimage is a process that I went through as a human being. It began in my elementary school. I was interested in a boy's smile. I did not realize why it happened, I just wanted to see him every time I went to school. In my junior high school, I would always stare at a boy. He later became my best friend. In my senior high school, I got verbal abuses such as, “Sissy, faggot.” I felt the sky was dark. I almost had no friends.

During my final year, I decided to tell my situation to my teacher. She was very religious. I told her that I liked men. She suggested that I go to a big church in my town. There I met the pastor and told him that I was interested in men. He gave me some biblical verses about same-sex relationship. He anointed me and tried to exorcise the evil spirits in me. That day I felt recovered, but the next day things returned as before. I still was interested in men.

After senior high school, I decided to enrol at Jakarta Theological Seminary (JTS). There I started to learn theology and the construction of human thought. It began when I met one JTS lecturer. Many friends called him the LGBTQI+ prophet.

In the seminary, each student was required to participate in campus activities. I chose the LGBTQI+ International Conference in 2016. I was afraid, but I wanted to know more about LGBTQI+, while still rejecting myself as gay.

At the conference, I met with a gay pastor and we had a discussion. He told me, “Look at yourself and see God in you.”

I borrowed all the books about sexuality and queer at JTS library. I learned many new things. I had always understood that God was masculine, but now I learnt that God could be present in every human experience. God is queer, too.

After a year, we had to do our field work. I was placed in an organization that works on HIV and AIDS issues. I found that most of those who work there are gay. First, I felt uncomfortable, because I knew that I was also part of them. From my interview, I found our struggle with religions were similar. I met Paul who taught me more about homosexuality. He helped me to feel some comfort that I never had before. I loved him.

When I came out to my friends, many were shocked and believed that I had been misguided. I told them that I am still the same Arisdo and I like men. I believe that there is nothing wrong with it.

Was my coming out easy? No! Sometimes I felt down and thought that what I was doing was wrong. Once I even tried to kill myself.

I learnt more about my identity through my classes of Religion and Sexuality and Queer Theology. I began to learn to think critically and became more confident to show that I am gay.

# Hendrika Mayora from Indonesia

## OUT OF PLACE



I was born as Hendrik Victor in a very pious Catholic family in Papua. During my youth I spent most of my free time with church activities. I felt I wanted to be like Jesus who was always ready to help the poor and the marginalized. As a child finally I aspired to be a priest. My family fully supported my wishes and they agreed to send me to the lower seminary.

In 2012 I was ordained to be a frater in a high seminary in Yogyakarta. When I confessed my feeling of being a woman to my superior, I was given a punishment. I had to leave the monastery and live a truly celibate life in the vows of poverty.

I often screamed like a possessed man, calling the man Hendrik to come back into my life. But it never happened. I began to wander far away.

Since leaving the monastery, I have tried to build up a new life. I worked as an activist in HIV / AIDS prevention in Merauke, West Papua. I was able to work to serve people in need. I became a tutor for the young people, as well as a health counsellor for them on how to avoid the HIV virus.

That was the time when for the first time I confessed to myself, “Yes, Hendrik, you are a woman.” I found joy and fun being together with some of my friends almost every night. Gradually, I felt that the vertigo I experienced when I was struggling with my real identity was gone.

At the end of 2017, I decided to move from Merauke and started a new life in another city. But where would I go? I went to Yogya and worked in an orphanage.

One day I attended a training on HIV/AIDS prevention, and I met Mama Rully, the head of the Yogyakarta Trans Woman group whom I had met before. After the meeting I asked her to help me, to stay with her. She agreed. Her house was very small but I felt I had found a real home there. I shared many things with her, and asked many questions about my gender identity. I then asked Mama Rully to dress me up like herself. I changed my name to Hendrika Victoria Mayora.

Initially I experienced racism from my own colleagues because of my dark skin. It broke my heart. However, I did not give up. I tried to get recognition by helping them if they had problems on the roads. I gained respect and my place in the Yogyakarta trans community.

With a friend's advice I founded a community. “Dawn of Sikka”. It was founded to accommodate trans women friends. The members are trans women from the whole eastern area of the Island of Flores.

Recently, I won an election for the seat at the Regional People's Consultative Body in my province in Flores. It is the first victory ever for a transgender in Indonesia.

*FROM INDONESIA*

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## Pauline from Singapore

# “WHY GOD DIDN’T CHANGE ME EVEN THOUGH I PRAYED” – RECONCILIATION FROM THE MARGINS



I am one of the executive pastors at Free Community Church, the only progressive and affirming Christian congregation in Singapore. I grew up in the Methodist Church.

“You’re Christian and lesbian?” When I answer this question with a yes, some look back at me with incredulity, some in awe and disbelief, and I sometimes chime in with a twinkle in my eye, “And I’m a pastor too.”

I am many things and I also happen to be gay. Being gay was not something that I chose (who would intentionally choose such a difficult path for themselves and their families?) and I realized early on that it was more than just a phase.

One thing I did choose is to be Christian. God and spirituality has always been important to me, and I have been a Christian since I was 13. By all accounts, I have had an “illustrious background” as an evangelical Christian. After some doubts and running away from God in my teens I had a life-changing encounter with God when I was 19. From that moment on, I told myself I wanted to take my spiritual life seriously and I became actively involved with a Christian group at university. I spent four years as a missionary in Japan and attended a conservative Bible college.

Throughout all that time, I remained gay and I couldn’t understand why God didn’t change me even though I prayed, fasted and begged God to. I was quite close to my family, especially my mum, and I could usually talk to them about most things except for my sexual orientation. It would break their hearts if they knew I was lesbian. So I wrestled alone with my faith and my sexuality. Both were undeniable facts of my life and the belief that there was no way to reconcile the two almost killed me.

Things finally came to a head when I was trying to get over the breakup of a relationship. It was hurting and there wasn’t a single soul I could confide in. I wasn’t out to any of my friends at that time. I could only talk to God. During that dark time, the one thing that kept me going was a deep knowing in my soul that somehow God loved me and God was okay with me, and I was okay with God. Each time I cried out to God, an inexplicable peace and assurance flooded my heart and soul. Experiencing this peace helped me take the first step towards accepting myself. When I began my full-time theological studies, I was surprised of how little I knew about the Bible and theology. I started studying the actual translations and historical contexts of those verses, and it made me even more convinced that God accepts and loves me just as I am.

When I finally had the courage to come out to my parents, it was really hard for them and my mum cried. That was almost 20 years ago. Even so, I feel that my relationship with my family changed for the better when I came out.

I share my story because I know there are many others like me. I say to those who have been struggling and wondering whether God accepts and loves them, God is waiting for them to come home.

FROM SINGAPORE

# Summer Sea from South Korea



## “NOW I’VE DECIDED NOT TO ABANDON ANYTHING OF MINE”

I am still on a path where my gender identity is unclear. In the process of forming my identity, it is not easy to unravel the threads among the various parts of me that make up myself. I see no other way but to blame my family of origin and our faith community for suppressing the most natural way of expressing both my body and the emotions that I have lived with all my life. I want to write here that I am not the fake you wanted then; that your words were wrong then.

I was born in 1999 in Seoul, South Korea, into a very devout and conservative Christian family. I lived in a household where my father was disgusted by the word gay, and my mother told me not to say anything “evil” – referencing same-sex partners. In my relationship with my mother, who lived a strict and ascetic faith, my sexuality was an important issue.

Since childhood, the emotions and desires that I felt as a human being were controlled in the name of God. For example, my love for someone, not only of the same sex but also of the opposite sex, used to be described as a being possessed by an “adulterous spirit.” I remember the first time I fell in love with someone of the same sex when I was 13 years old. Since then, I’ve loved four more people, and I can’t count all the times I felt attraction and erotic sensations.

As I think of it now, I think my mother knew very early that my sexual orientation was not “normal,” but I treated my experiences as separate and less authentic and tried to be heterosexual. She was probably trying to protect me, but I still imagine going back and talking to my mother in the past. I would say something like: “I did not like my friend simply because I read a novel about homosexuality and imitated it,” or “It wasn’t the spirit that came into me that liked them, it was actually me.” I wish that I could talk to my mom about these things comfortably. Perhaps someday.

Now I am separated from my family. I am living a life that is not completely cut off from the once abandoned past, loosely labelled as bisexual and genderqueer. Together with the people I care about, I belong to a safe community and participate in the Christian queer movement and other social minority movements. I am still quite often confused, anxious, and get hurt, but at the same time I live in this joyful, free, precious moment. I am looking for a broader God, different from the God of my mother who hurt me.

The comfort that the queer community has given me is that it allows me to affirm my state of being mixed up without any ambiguity. It’s about letting myself be taught that it’s okay if I can’t find the answer or have anything neatly organized. Now I’ve decided not to abandon anything of mine. Even if it is a little heavy and difficult, I decided to carry the baggage that my existence has accumulated. I hope everything we carry is okay. For you and me, I hope the world where we live in becomes a little better.



Chen  
Xiaoen  
from  
Taiwan



## MARGINALIZATION ENGENDERS RECONCILIATION: HOW BEING A SEXUAL MINORITY MAKES ME A BETTER PERSON

I was born in 1980, and I grew up in a devout evangelical family and attended the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT). Ever since I was a child, I clung tightly to God: not because of my Christian upbringing, nor my almost-exclusively church-based adolescence; rather, it stemmed out of an awareness of my oddities and loneliness, which drove me ever closer to God.

Likewise, it was not out of piousness that I took relationship issues seriously, even before my first crush. Rather, it was out of the knowledge that same sex relationship would not be accepted by the church or other Christians that drove me pondering long and hard over the types and forms of relationship: What is the difference between love and affection? What constitutes friendship or romantic love? What marks a committed relationship or a lifelong partner? What is marriage? How to negotiate the difference (if any) between religious views and that of the law?

The same applies to my response to God's calling to ministerial roles and theology studies: the fervor for biblical research stems not from a personal pursuit for God's words, or even a liking for theological or biblical studies; rather, it stems from a desire to understand what the Bible, what God really says. I feel the need to delve deeper to discern God's calling for sexual minorities like me and for our community, and to decipher the different responses by God's people at different times to these words.

The absence of pastoral guidance in the mainline churches urges me to equip myself for the role of walking with others as they journey in God's presence and through different life stages.

I am yet to find the answers to my questions. But these years of pursuit have accentuated my yearnings and testified to God's never-failing presence and support. God is truly a God who sits through my days of misery and depravity. I also experienced the resurrective power of rebirth as new meanings and perspectives brought new life to my past experiences.

Being still within the confines of a conservative seminary, I cannot come out completely. I can nonetheless interact with teachers and students alike with a simple authenticity. I believe that with God's love and a faith based on Jesus, when the moment of truth comes to light in the future, we will embrace each other with a more profound understanding and unity.



Ivon from  
Germany



“THE  
BIBLE  
IS ANTI-  
FUNDAMENTALIST  
IN ITSELF” –  
BEING IN-BETWEEN  
AND A CHILD OF  
GOD

When I was a child I loved the bible. The stories spoke to me and encouraged me. But when I realized that I was queer, the bible seemed to turn against me. It is written: God created men and women—nothing in between. Only heterosexual love is acceptable to God. Period. I struggled with myself—being torn between my love for God, God’s word and my gender/sexual identity.

When I started studying theology I learned about liberation / feminist / queer theology and bible reading. I fell in love with the bible again: It centres around oppressed and marginalized people—affirming a God who craves freedom and well-being for all of God’s creatures.

It is not just that: I also found out that the bible is anti-fundamentalist in itself. By its deeply dialogic structure it invites us to add our own experiences to God’s story, calls us to share God’s mission. Understanding this brought me to peace with God and myself.

I am deeply grateful to work in a LGBTIQ affirmative church that allows me to share my love for God and God’s word with others.

# Judit from Hungary



## TESTIMONY OF A LOVING GOD

I am Judit, I am 39 and my hometown is Budapest. My immediate family did not practice Christianity but I learned about faith from my maternal grandmother. My sister and I stayed at her place on weekends and we went to a church of Reformed (Calvinist) tradition. After my confirmation at 17, I left the church because I felt that it was too narrow and separate from the world that I wanted to explore as a teenager. It was also around this age that I started to fall in love with girls.

During my university years, I joined *Labrisz Lesbian Association* for women as a volunteer and took part in organizing events. I enjoyed activism. I was a believer all this time but I did not feel the need to practice my religion. Later on I started missing a religious community and that is when I found *Mozaik Community*, an ecumenical Christian group for LGBTQ+ people and their allies.

In 2016, *Háttér Society*, a Hungarian LGBTQ+ organization, had a project named LGBTQ & Christian dialogue. That is how I attended my first annual meeting of the European Forum of LGBTQ Christian Groups which for me was life-changing. I could describe this experience as everything coming together in one piece. And that piece – or peace – now I can say was God's Love. That is what unites us in the Forum. This

piece and peace also became my mission. After attending the Forum in Gdansk and listening to Krzysztof Charamsa, I knew that I just had to do something in Hungary so that people could experience what I did in this community. Charamsa was talking about how *coming out* is our act of protest and our act of resistance in our respective churches. I say: "I had a calling."

At that time, I wanted to become a pastor, probably the first out gay pastor in Hungary. Churches in Hungary do not yet allow for out homosexual pastors or priests. I studied theology at Wesley Theological College maintained by the Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship, a church not recognized as a church by the government for political reasons.

I also worked for the church as a pastoral associate. I came out to this community. The congregation's pastor is on her journey of acceptance but unfortunately not accepting yet. The majority of the congregation is welcoming but I would describe my church environment as "on the way." I was the first to come out to the congregation and to the seminary. I can also say that there are small changes visible: during Advent of 2019, we worked together with the church and issued a declaration that mentions LGBTQ+ people: *"The spread of fear towards, and alienation of, distinctive social groups by means of government policies is a worldwide problem which we experience in Hungary, too. We believe that it is not hatred but the practice of getting to know each other and inclusion that bring all of us closer to those belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community."*

I am in my fourth year of theology and the working title of my thesis is "Queer theology as liberation."

FROM HUNGARY

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# Uschi from Poland

## “I AM STRUGGLING WITH MY BI-VISIBILITY”



I am a bisexual Roman Catholic woman from Warsaw, Poland, living in a same-sex relationship for over 15 years, and I am an active and practising member of the Church.

I have been engaged in the Church since my early teens as a member of a predominantly youth-oriented organisation Light-Life Movement (Ruch Światło-Życie), back then never questioning my heterosexual identity. My process of coming out as a bisexual person started when I was already an adult, and was well thought-out. As a result, I was mercifully spared all the suffering of internal homo/bi-phobia, and was almost perfectly at peace with myself, except for my relationship with the Church. (I suffered acute homo/biphobia from my parents, but that is a different story). Not an active member of any organisation, I was still engaged in regular practice; however, as I was aware I was not following Church's teachings, because of my active sexual life, whether same-sex or different-sex, I did not take holy sacraments. I felt it was rather fair: I did not play by the rules, but at the same time I was beginning to question the teaching of the Church on homosexuality. And the more I realised how absurd it felt for me, the more I withdrew from active practice.

A turning point—and for me a clear sign of the activity of the Holy Spirit—was when I was asked to become a godmother. The child's parents insisted I was the best person available to play that role, and I felt that in order to show the Catholic Church to my goddaughter I needed to be more inside it. That was when I took the effort to reconcile living in a long-term, loving and committed same-sex relationship with what the Church says about the marriage, and assumed that as I could not marry my partner (Poland has no marriage equality, not even civil partnerships), I could hold these teachings as valid for me. It had been perfectly clear for me before that my relationship is not a sin, so everything perfectly clicked in its place.

However, what I am struggling with is my bi-visibility. Among my modern and open-minded fellow Catholics, intellectuals from a big city, I can be fairly open about by living in a same-sex relationship. It raises some eyebrows, but I have experienced almost no rejection. However, coming out as bisexual is always a challenge for me. I know I can expect some level of understanding that God made me homosexual (i.e., considered “unfit” for traditional marriage), but very little understanding that I choose to share my life with a woman rather than have no other option. This can be too much even for my accepting fellow Catholics—or at least I think so. I hardly ever have the courage and stamina to try and find out.

The only place where I feel absolutely safe to be open and truly me in all my identities is the Polish organisation for LGBT+ Christians: Faith and Rainbow (Wiara i Tęcza). There I receive emotional support, share my doubts, help others but above all develop as Christian in a welcoming and ecumenical atmosphere.

# Ewa Hołuszko from Poland



## “I HAD TO MAKE A LIFE- SAVING DECISION”: TRANS AND ORTHODOX

I was born in 1950 to an Orthodox Christian family. The beauty of that tradition and its liturgy has always been close to my heart. Yet, I believe that God is the Absolute to whom the roads of different denominations can lead.

As I matured, taking on male roles gave rise to inner resentment and, over time, a growing psychological split. At the same time, I was attracted to women. I couldn't solve the mystery of what caused my problems because the term transsexual did not appear in Polish literature until 1982. I entrusted my problems to God and fought them through intensive physical exercise. I became a practicing believer, sensitive to family matters as well as to the injustices in the world. Outside, I seemed a very tough, uncompromising man.

I began my activity against the communist regime in 1968 when I co-organised a school strike in support of students and participated in demonstrations. I continued my activity even after I started lecturing at the Technical University.

In 1976, during a trip to Western Europe, I found out who I really was and that my problems were related to my gender identity. I was already married and had a son. I swore that I would survive for the sake of my loved ones in my hated biological body, but in my inner speech I addressed myself as a woman. Only God was the confidant of my secret. I did not entrust it even to my confessor.

I continued my activities against the regime in the Solidarity movement. I was a member of the board of its Warsaw chapter. While I hid during martial law (1981-83), I managed to co-build the largest underground anti-communist organization in the Polish capital. After my arrest, I was imprisoned and subjected to interrogations, which I endured without giving anyone away.

In the new post-1989 reality, problems of trans persons intensified. I had to make a life-saving decision to get up on the path of transition and gender reassignment. After the operation, I lost all my scientific, social and political achievements. I went from being a well-known person to being nobody, at the bottom of society. After the initial shock effect, the Orthodox Church allowed me to partake of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Although some of its priests do not accept the changes in my life, the Metropolitan has appointed two priests to be my confessors.

I am slowly regaining my role in social and political activities. For my services to democratic Poland, I have received some of the highest state awards, but at the same time I am often the object of harassment and transphobic attacks. However, I know that I am finally myself.

I never lost my sense of connection with God. During the difficult moments of my childhood and youth, of hiding from the security service, in prison and in persecution, in political transformations, and even after oncological illness, it was God who saved me in the most difficult moments of my life. When I decided to commit suicide, God kept me alive. I trust in God so that I do not feel any fear of death. God will accept me as I really am.

FROM POLAND

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# Yael and Yana Yanovich from Russia

## “WE FELL IN LOVE FROM THE START”



**W**e lead gatherings and music services at “Light of the World”, an independent non-denominational LGBT Christian group.

*Yael:* Born to a conservative Evangelical Christian Baptist family, I attended gatherings with my mother since I was a child, and now we sometimes visit the Lutheran Cathedral with Yana and Light of the World.

I realized my sexual orientation at thirteen. On my journey of self-acceptance, when I was already part of Light of the World, I began to realize that God’s law was for all people in relationships and that includes same-sex couples and families.

*Yana:* I was born in a small town and moved to Siberia where I lived and studied when I was twenty. In 2009, I studied at a Bible school organised by the Word of Life charismatic church in Moscow. I was seeking answers about my faith and sexuality. 2009 was the year Yuri and I organised Light of the World, an LGBT Christian group. People call me their leader but I prefer keeper. I believed that God loves me but I needed time for that. I wanted to share this message with other LGBTs.

### How we met

*Yael:* In 2015 I found the Light of the World, an LGBT Christian group and contacted the community leader – Yana, and began to attend the community’s activities.

Yana and I fell in love from the start. I hinted that I would like to get married but I didn’t make a serious proposal because I wanted to wait for her to be ready.

In 2016 we proposed to each other and exchanged rings and decided to refrain from physical intimacy. We planned to get married in 2017 but decided that we needed more time to prepare for the wedding and strengthen our relationship. We went through a Jewish ritual of purification in the sea (mikvah) – to purify ourselves from our past lives for each other.

*Yana:* I love Yael for many reasons. She is caring and supportive. We pray together. I just can’t imagine my life without her.

Nobody in the LGBT community thinks about church blessings. One day Yael and I started talking about relationships before marriage and we discovered that we had the same dream! We went to a church where we prayed for ourselves and asked God for a blessing, and for forgiveness for being physically intimate before the wedding. We called each other brides. We believe that God blessed us.

### Our wedding

*Yana:* Our beautiful wedding took place in 2018 in Protestant Kerk Amsterdam – Keizersgrachtkerk, officiated by Wielie Elhorst. Memories of preparing for the wedding are a great support to us particularly now when we are forced to hide it from our families. A wedding is a seal of God when two people enter into a covenant. Through God the priest puts a seal on the relationship and the Church acts as a witness.

*Yael:* I love Yana. She is beautiful, tender; her heart is big and filled with compassion for her neighbours. With her I am learning to love and to be better. We go to church together, share our experiences and help each other grow spiritually. When God is present in our home, the relationship rises to a special level of holiness.

FROM RUSSIA

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# Hanna Medko from Ukraine



## HOW GOD GAVE BACK TO ME

**F**or many of us who were born in the Soviet Union, accepting ourselves and God can be challenging. My father grew up in an orphanage, out of touch with his roots and traditions. My mother was brought up by her mom, a strict and dominating lady, as pragmatic and down-to-earth as one can be. And here I was, a product of my times and my parents.

At the end of my third year at school, my younger sister got run over by a tractor. That was the day when I first cried out to God. Or to be precise, I made a demand: "If you exist, you must make her live!" Now I understand that with the traumas she had sustained, living on would have been a crueller outcome than being delivered from that pain.

My second test came when I was 20 when due to doctors' fault I lost my son. After the foetus-destroying operation, I was diagnosed with infertility. The next year I spent in agony and depression. My heart became as if covered in a crust of ice. I could neither smile nor cry. My sleepless nights were spent praying for the chance to become a mother. When a year later I visited a doctor, they told me that I might, perhaps, one day, several years after a surgical revision or thanks to IVF, be able to bear a child. But for now, they said, you need hormones, and for sure you'll never get pregnant "naturally." This sounded like a verdict.

Imagine my surprise when precisely seven days later I realised I was pregnant! After a month, it was confirmed by a midwife. That was the first time I cried that year. I was weeping with joy, feeling that ice crust melting. I started to learn to smile again, and to enjoy every single moment. I came to realise what it means to experience every day as the first and the last one at the same time. I begged God for a miracle, and I got one. But God had different plans for me.

When, many years later, my daughter brought her friend home, the young man introduced himself saying, "My name is Dima and I'm gay!"

My only response was: "I'm Hanna and your orientation makes no difference to me." To say he was surprised is an understatement.

Together, Dima and my daughter rented an apartment for some time, until they had to move out. That's when they asked if they could stay with me for a while. One night, Dima stayed out late, and I got worried. I called him to ask if he was okay. He came home in tears and shared his story. He was 14 when he had to run away from his family. He told me everything that had followed.

We cried through the night, and in the morning he asked me if he could call me "mom." That's how God gave me back what had once been taken away from me by the doctors.

## Rev. Dr. Christina (Tina) Beardsley from the UK



### RECONCILING THE IRRECONCILABLE?

In 2017 I was invited to be a consultant in the Church of England's latest attempt to address sexuality, gender, and human identity, which is called Living in Love and Faith (LLF) and due to report in November 2020.

Sixteen years earlier, in 2001, I was marginalized by the Church's leadership for having transitioned as a priest working in healthcare. Four years later, in 2005, my bishop had become more accepting. Now I was participating in a national church project alongside people holding very different views to mine about LGBTI+ people. One aim of the project was to reconcile people with conflicting beliefs about sexuality and gender identity.

As time went I found this problematic as some of these convictions seemed totally incompatible and irreconcilable. How does one reconcile a Christian who believes that marriage can only be between a man and a woman with a Christian who believes in equal marriage? Or a Christian who believes that it's sinful for someone to transition with a Christian who regards transition as affirming of someone's God-given gender identity? Indeed, the Anglican Communion has already split over these things to an extent.

My concerns over attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable reached their limit in January 2019, when in conscience I was no longer able to continue. I had a helpful exit interview and my initial reflections on why I left appeared in the Church Times.

Rarely can the Church, as an institution, claim to be a neutral space where people of differing views can be reconciled. It usually has a line, a position. In terms of sexuality, the Church of England doesn't permit the celebration of same sex marriages in church, disciplines clergy who marry someone of the same sex and issues statements that can leave LGBTI+ people feeling second class.

When the Church brings together people with differing theologies of gender identity and sexuality there is inequality rather than equivalence. For LGBTI+ people these discussions are not an intellectual debate, they are about our identities and our lives. This is why many LGBTI+ people are increasingly reluctant to engage in such conversations, both in wider society and in church settings; who we are, and how we live our lives, should not be a matter of debate.

Even before I joined LLF's Coordinating Group it was immediately obvious to me which member of the group I was meant to 'balance' in terms of holding an opposing theology of sexuality and gender. Yet, such is God's way that this was the person in the group I most easily connected with. I discovered that we shared a similar sense of humor – perhaps because they too are something of an 'outsider' though in a different way from me – and they remain friends. As unlikely as it seemed prior to joining the group, at that personal level at least, reconciliation actually happened. Blessed be the God of surprises!

## Rev. Tony Franklin-Ross from New Zealand



### “LIVING THE ‘HYPHEN’ THAT HOLDS DIVERSITY TOGETHER” — A PERSONAL TESTIMONY FOR QUEERED-ECUMENISM

Reflecting on living the “hyphen” that holds diversity together – sometimes in a tension that can be creative – can also feel like Jacob’s wrestling with the angels. I live in hyphenated experiences, including *pakeha*-Kiwi, cis male-queer, gay-Christian, progressive-orthodox, ordained-disciple, pastor-theologian, and of queering-ecumenist.

As teenagers, my school friend Nick and I were counselled by a youth leader about our attraction to men. Nick committed suicide as he struggled to reconcile his faith and sexuality. I believed that being created in the likeness of God, including my sexuality, had to be a stronger affirmation than the alternative of death.

I left church community during my university years, learned more about myself as a gay man and discovered gay community. Later, I felt God calling me to re-engage with church, and found a family in Auckland Community Church. My theology was formed there through the diversities of LGBTIQ and straight. People are from different denominations. For some it is their primary faith community, and for others it is a steppingstone to exiting organized religion or (re)entry into it. It is a faith community on the margins of mainstream Christianity yet faith is their centre. Its members and the clergy leading weekly Eucharist come from a diversity of denominations.

This drew me to ordained ministry in my Methodist denomination, with its theological framework of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, and also my desire to be ecumenical. I was the first out gay male to be trained for ordination in the Methodist Church of Aotearoa-New Zealand, and the first to be ordained alongside with another gay male in 2009. In the 1990s, MCNZ had been riven by the debate on sexuality in ordained ministry.

I came across the publication *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* when I attended the WCC Assembly in Busan in 2013. The heartbeat of the document is its call to mission from the margins: challenging conventional understandings that mission is always done by the powerful to the powerless, by the global North to the global South, by the straight to the queer.

It is a clear challenge to listen to the voices from those marginalized communities where people find strength. There is a diversity of voices from the LGBTIQ+ margins – of joy, hope, fear, pain, hurt, life, death – the plethora of lived experience through the lens of sexuality. The same plethora of human expression as found in the Psalms, a collection of conversations with God.

My particular experiences from the queer margins affirm a queer ecumenism. Queer theology is radical love – a love so extreme that it dissolves the existing boundaries that separate us from other people, from conceived notions of gender and sexuality or even from God. A holistic attitude to otherness is found where one learns to include and recognise those who do not fit one’s own vision of how to live and act as an undivided body. The power that is love in the experience of such reconciliation is in the releasing of God’s power.

FROM NEW ZEALAND

# Maximilian Feldhake from Germany



## TOLERANCE AND INCLUSIVITY AT THE HEART OF FAITH

**I** am a Jew, I am a Rabbi and I am gay. I am 32 years old. I was born and grew up in Phoenix, Arizona, USA, and immigrated to Germany in 2012. I live and work in Berlin.

Tolerance, inclusivity and openness are all at the heart of Reform Judaism. It is our movement which ordained the first female rabbis; our movement, alongside the Reconstructionist movement, which first embraced gay and lesbian laypeople and clergy.

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MAXIMILIAN FELDHAKÉ

The question of sexual orientation in the Jewish community was never an issue for me. My home synagogue's senior rabbi is a proud, out lesbian. I never encountered open hostility or homophobia in my Reform Jewish world. For me – as is the case for countless millions of other progressively minded Jews – issues of sexuality are a non-issue.

There is an often cited Talmudic story about what the core message of the Torah is. A gentile requests of Rabbi Hillel that he convert him on the condition that Hillel teach him the entire Torah while the gentile stands on one foot. Hillel converted him and said: "That which is hateful to you, do not do to another; that is the entire Torah the rest is commentary. Now go and learn it."

This story only really makes sense in the context of the first half. The gentile had first asked Rabbi Shammai to convert him and teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Shammai dismisses the man and pushes him away with a builder's cubit.

Sadly, for many of my coreligionists it is the example of Shammai and not Hillel which continues to dictate their attitudes towards LGBTQ Jews. It is incomprehensible and unconscionable to me that so many Jews are treated with hate and contempt by those who claim to represent some sort of more authentic and correct Judaism.

Treating LGBTQ Jews with love and acceptance is not up for debate – at least from my perspective – and yet it is 2021 and the level of homophobia which exists in some corners of the Jewish world is truly awful.

The only thing I can do – as a Jew and a Rabbi – is continue to be open, to be proud and unapologetic about myself and my values. Regressive intolerant people of faith exist in a multitude of religious communities. I have no time or patience for these people.

My Judaism and my Rabbinate are focused on affirming the central tenets of our faith, of empowering Jews and strengthening the bonds of the Jewish people.

FROM GERMANY

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# Muhsin Hendricks from South Africa



## MUSLIM AND GAY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Feeling rejected for being different has always been a theme in my life. Not only was I effeminate and shunned for it, but I was also left-handed and forced to write and eat with my right hand. I was born into a conservative Muslim family. My grandfather was the Imam (religious leader) at our community mosque. My mother was a teacher there, and my father a spiritual healer.

I knew that I was different from other boys. I was hiding my true self, pretending to be one with the male crowd, even though it brought me endless pain. Whenever I was teased, I would feel the non-acceptance that drove me further into the closet. Between the ages of 23 and 29, I tried my best to live up to expectations. I married a woman and had three kids. It was during a moment of my soul's yearning for freedom that I mustered the courage to walk away from a marriage that was offering only pain to both of us. Then I took up willful isolation on a friend's farm, sleeping in a cold and empty barn for three months. I took a vow to continue to fast until God sent me guidance or until hunger drove me to my end.

One day, close to the end of my hermitage, I had a moment of truth. I was overwhelmed by a sense of knowing who I was, and I came to realize that in all my loneliness I was never alone and that my Hijrah (migration) into seclusion was a necessary stage in my soul's journey into becoming me. I knew I was drawing closer to God and in knowing God, the more I came to know myself. I was being shaped through my challenges so that I might one day be a pillar of strength to those who are also seeking that which has always been seeking them.

I was ready to come out even if it meant the end of my life. My need for authenticity was greater than my need to survive. I invited the media to come and listen to my story. When it was published with the heading "Gay Imam comes out of the closet," I knew it would cause an uproar. I was fired from my teaching post at the mosque and branded as "out of the fold" by my community. I was happy to be out of the fold of an Islam that was not upholding the values of inclusivity and compassion that I so often read about in the Qur'an, which was my companion in times of loneliness.

I may have missed out many years of my youth, but what I have gained in God is priceless. For me, my sexual orientation and the challenges that went with it was the impetus to a greater relationship with my first love, my Creator.

*Imam Muhsin Hendricks is founder of the Al Ghurbaah Foundation in Cape Town, South Africa. It is a place where Muslims who are marginalized because of their sexual orientation, gender identity and belief can go and find psycho-spiritual and social support. See: <https://www.al-ghurbaah.org.za/>*

FROM SOUTH AFRICA

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# THANK YOU



An incredible accomplishment has been achieved. For the past two-and-a-half years, many people have been involved in the development of *Reconciliation From the Margins*. Ideas were collected in a workshop 2019 in Geneva, and the publication team was formed. Thank you to Misza, Kerstin, Pearl and Martin for coordination of this work. Then many authors were found, offering their testimonies from diverse countries, religious backgrounds, gender identities and sexual orientations. Translators had to be found for the ten languages in which this publication is offered. The team coordinated the editing process, negotiated with the designers and printers, and organised transportation and delivery to Karlsruhe in time for the WCC Assembly. Thank you to Kerstin and Martin for the introduction to queer theology and to former WCC General Secretary Bishop Olav Fykse Tveit for his words of greeting.

Without the countless hours of volunteer work that has gone into this publication this would not have been possible. We would like to thank and express our deep appreciation to all who have been part of this incredible process.

It is our hope that readers listen and be moved through *Reconciliation From the Margins*. May your efforts bear fruit and this publication reach the heart and minds of many during the WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe and beyond.

Mette Basboll and Gabriele Mayer  
Co-coordinators of the Rainbow Pilgrims of Faith coalition

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