

Witness Statement

I have a sense that I am just one of thousands who would love to say (though they may not know or accept it!) that their spiritual home is within the Roman Catholic Church. Realising this for me involved working through dark feelings of mistrust, anger and fear towards the Church. I took small, gradual steps: attending Mass in different places, buying the odd Catholic journal, exploring online, finding a spiritual director and reading thoughtful books. During prayer this question returned to me again and again – Why should I, as someone seeking a deeper discipleship of Jesus Christ, be excluded from the immense richness of Catholic spirituality and community? Why should you?

I left the Anglican church as a questioning teenager, spent my undergraduate years as a humanist, rediscovered 'spirituality' through Zen Buddhism, rested for a while within Quakerism and now in my early thirties have begun the process of being received into the Catholic Church. I can now see that the Holy Spirit has pursued me down the years. Through many years of prayer and reflection the Spirit has taught me that my capacity for loving-intimacy towards other men is in truth good and holy. I admit that my restless religious seeking helped to contain the brokenness within my heart after growing up without the ability to express my sexuality and often encountering poor role-models for a healthy and integrated 'gay' life. The difficulties within the Church around human sexuality have unexpectedly been a great gift for me! They have forced (unfortunately 'forced' is the right word) a deep exploration of the multiple aspects hindering an integration of the sexual and spiritual life. Some of my conclusions do differ from the current teaching of the Church but I hope to speak of my experience in love just as I hoped to be listened to in love.

Being within a faithful and stable relationship for some years now is a place of great spiritual stability and nurture for me. Trusting in the sacramental nature of this love and commitment is probably the greatest challenge, opportunity and joy within my life at the moment. On my journey to Catholicism the most helpful thing has been finding individuals and worshipping communities that can offer friendship and formation. The community around the LGBT Catholics Westminster Pastoral Council and Farm Street Church have become central for me. Travelling into London (I live near Oxford) provides a valuable discipline in addition to attending Mass more locally and visiting retreat centres around the country. My hope is that the LGBTQ Catholic community will grow in confidence and gain a theological coherence in proclaiming our acceptance by Christ. I hope that as LGBTQ disciples we can refashion (rather than reject) Church insights and practices that still embody realities of the Christian life. I hope that the Church will listen - then be still in prayer - and respond with compassion and courage. If the Holy Spirit has brought you to this point of reading, take the plunge and join us in discovering a Christ-like life of integrity and service.