

## LETTER FROM SÃO PAULO

### Document of the 1st LGBTI+ Community and Churches Congress: Ecumenical Dialogues toward Respect for Diversity

We, the people gathered at the **1st LGBTI+ Community and Churches Congress**, held in the **city of São Paulo**, in the Holy Trinity Parish of the Anglican Diocese of São Paulo/IEAB, **June 20–22, 2019**, and co-organized by Koinonia – Ecumenical Presence and Service, have produced the following **Letter from São Paulo**:

We affirm that all people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, transvestites, transsexuals, non-binary, intersex, queer, and any other expressions of gender, as do any and all people, have the right to seek God, spirituality, the sacred, the truth, and love in any religious space, especially in the traditions in which they were raised. This right is not exclusive to white, cisgender and heterosexual people.

We affirm that all people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, transvestites, transsexuals, non-binary, intersex, queer, and any other expressions of gender, as do any and all people, have the right to read, study, and interpret the Bible and other sacred texts, and to produce theology, in dialogue with their communities, with their history, their readings of reality, their life experiences, faith, suffering, joy and hope. This right is not exclusive to cisgender men and white heterosexual people.

We affirm that all people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, transvestites, transsexuals, non-binary, intersex, queer, and any other expressions of gender, as do any and all people, have the right to be respected, accepted and acknowledged, and fully participate in a life of faith in their religious communities, and to take on decision-making roles as well as positions of ministries, pastorals, leaders and protagonists. This right is not exclusive to cisgender men and white heterosexual people.

We have found and lament that many institutions have been accomplices and that religious language has been appropriated to constitute, reproduce and perpetuate the cis-heteronormative system of control over peoples' bodies and subjectivities – a system that has produced exclusion, erasure, suffering, violence and death. The deaths of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, but especially transgender people, transgender people, non-binary people, intersex, queer and other expressions of gender in Brazil and Latin America, are imbued with hegemonic Christian theology.

We lament and denounce that many communities of faith, especially among Christians, have become places of silence, oppression, humiliation, exclusion, and spiritual, psychic, economic and sexual abuse. Maxims such as “God loves sinners but hates sin” and “Male and female He created them” are often used to produce fear, shame, guilt and silencing. Speech and practices such as these have contributed to produce violent family relationships, psychological distress and, at the extremes, many cases of depression and suicide among people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, transvestites, transsexuals, non-binary people, intersex, queer, and other expressions gender, especially those who are black, poor and from vulnerable territories.

We lament and denounce that, as a strategy to achieve representativeness, many political and media leaders of the religious field, especially among Christians, are appropriating and instrumentalizing religious/theological language and social imaginary to produce and disseminate moral panic, resentment, fear and hatred, based on expressions such as “gender ideology” and reinforcement of “manliness.” This model of political action, in addition to betraying the ethical principles of Christianity as well as those of diverse religions, has produced the fragmentation and destruction of relationships in many families and communities of faith. It has also produced a perverse effect of denying the fundamental rights of protection and citizenship of various vulnerable and stigmatized populations. One of the most perverse facets of this problem has been neglect of public health issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, and avoidable deaths due to unsafe abortion, as well as an incentive to search for sexual reorientation and reversal of sex reassignment surgeries. Another serious effect has been the disarticulation of public education policies aimed at combating violence and discrimination related to gender and sexual orientation.

We lament and denounce that religious and theological language is being used, especially among Christians, to justify and promote religious racism and the dehumanization of black populations, traditional peoples and communities, in the countryside, by the water and in the forests, residents of impoverished urban outskirts, peasants, immigrants, refugees, women, LGBTQIA+, and other vulnerable groups. This dehumanization has been the basis for necropolitics, materialized in processes of exclusion, invisibilization, miserabilization, violence, and extermination of these populations. Another one of the most perverse facets of this problem has been the violent attacks on traditional black and indigenous communities, inclusive churches, and other non-Christian temples and religious venues.

We lament that religious leaders who have made commitments to the acceptance, pastoral support and advocacy for LGBTQIA+ populations and other vulnerable communities are often being persecuted, excluded and/or silenced in their communities of faith and religious denominations of origin.

We see with joyfulness and hopefulness the existence and the emergence of new communities of faith that have taken on the responsibility to welcome and to become safe spaces for the celebration, sharing and living of the faith of LGBTQIA+ people, and assuming a commitment to fight against sexism, racism, and class inequalities. We affirm the importance of valuing, visibilizing and strengthening the work of these communities, as well as celebrating the generations that preceded us in the struggle for the rights of LGBTQIA+ and paved the way for new forms of struggle and acceptance to become reality.

We emphasize, however, that the mere formal acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people is not enough. It is necessary to develop safe communities that do not reproduce models of exclusion, invisibilization, silencing, abuse and violence, whether spiritual, symbolic, psychological, sexual, economic or physical, and that create conditions for healing and reconciliation in the face of these processes.

The struggle for the inclusion and recognition of LGBTQIA+ people against the cis-heteronormative, classist, racist and misogynist religious model is not just a need and an issue that concerns only LGBTQIA+ people and vulnerable populations. It is a struggle that concerns all people of faith and a central element of the message of Christianity and several other religions: reconciliation of people with God/the sacred, with oneself, with one’s body, with other people, and with reality. Homo/lesbophobia is a problem of heterosexual people;

transphobia is a problem of cisgender people; sexism is a problem of men; social injustice is a problem of the rich, and racism is a problem of white people.

It is necessary, especially among Christian people, to recover the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, of radical and transformational love; to confront the religious models of legalism and the exploitation of guilt, resentment, fear, and hatred. The path to be followed necessarily traverses the challenge to develop new models of community living of faith, based on hope, friendship, creativity, and beauty, and seeking to build a new reality from the outlook of love, peace, solidarity, and justice.

We pray that the renewing breath of the Holy Spirit and the power of faith will inspire and restore our time. We invite all people who share this dream to participate in the construction of this reality!

This letter was compiled by people present at the Congress and who have identified themselves based on the following religious and non-religious traditions, denominations and affiliations, and does not necessarily represent the official position of each one of the institutions:

Aids Healthcare Foundation – AHF Brasil

Aliança de Batistas do Brasil

Anglicanxs – Catedral Anglicana da Santíssima Trindade – PoA/RS

Associação Brasileira de Lésbicas, Gays, Bissexuais, Travestis e Transexuais (ABGLT)

Associação Hikari

Associação Nacional de Travestis e Transexuais (ANTRA)

Caminho da Graça

Catedral Anglicana do Bom Samaritano-Diocece Anglicana do Recife

Católicas pelo Direitos de Decidir-CDD

Centro de Estudos Bíblicos- CEBI

Centro de Estudos Anglicanos- CEA

Centro Espírita Kardecista

Comissão LGBT do MST

Comissão Pastoral da Terra- CPT

Comunidade Anglicana Redenção – Diocece Anglicana no Brasil

Comunidade Cristã Nova Esperança- CCNE da Vila Mariana

Comunidade de Vida Cristã do Brasil – CVX Brasil

Comunidades Tradicionais de Religião de Matriz Africana - Ilê Axé Omó Nanã; Ilê Asé Iyalode Oyó; RENAFRO-SP

Diversidade Católica – Rio de Janeiro; Campinas; São Paulo

Evangélicas pela Igualdade de Gênero – EIG

Evangelicxs pela Diversidade

Fé, Família, Igualdade – A Mesa-Redonda Latinx Féministas

Força Tarefa Jovens Lideranças

Frente de Evangélicos pelo Estado de Direito

Grupo de Ação Pastoral da Diversidade (GAPD)

Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia

Igreja Batista  
Igreja Batista do Caminho  
Igreja Betesda  
Igreja Católica Apostólica Romana-ICAR  
Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil- IEAB  
Igreja Evangélica  
Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil-IECLB  
Igreja Metodista do Brasil-IMB  
Igreja Metodista Unida  
Igreja Pentecostal  
Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil-IPB  
Igrejas da Comunidade Metropolitana – ICM Brasil  
Instituto Brasileiro de Transmasculinidades (IBRAT)  
Koinonia – Presença Ecumênica e Serviço  
Mães pela Diversidade  
Missão One Heart for Healing  
Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens - MAB  
Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra - MST  
Movimento Negro Evangélico de Pernambuco  
Movimento Pastoral LGBT “Marielle Franco” – MOPA  
Paróquia da Santíssima Trindade - Diocese Anglicana de São Paulo  
Pastoral da Juventude Rural  
Pessoas “desigrejadas”  
Pessoas sem religião  
Rainbow Sangha  
Rede Ecumênica da Juventude – REJU  
Rede Nacional de Grupos Católicos LGBT  
Scottish Episcopal Church  
The Episcopal Church - USA  
UMForward  
We Are Church – São Paulo