



Icon of Emmaus



Emmaus by Janet Brooks-Gerloff, 1992 – Benedictine Kornelimünster Abbey,
Aachen

Acknowledgments

The Icons of Emmaus came about as a result of a meeting between Archbishop Nichols (now Cardinal) with the Chair of Quest: Ruby Almeida and the Deputy Chair: Michael Bennett. In that meeting the Archbishop suggested that Quest might want to look at the story of Emmaus and what it might illuminate for the organisation.

A number of people were involved in the development and delivery of a series of workshops which were undertaken at the 2014 Conference in Scarborough “So Hope for a Great Sea-Change”. Following the conference, the responses from the workshop were gathered together and a section of Quest’s website dedicated to making the information available more widely.

As we move forward, we further recognise the value of this work and want it to be more readily available and so have curated this document.

Particular thanks go to TW for his part in the lead up to the conference and in the collation and presentation of the original material on the website. Thanks also to John Ashman for his part in that preparation and for the curation of the original materials into the document which follows.

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What is the Icon of Emmaus?

An icon, in religious language, is most often considered to be a work of art commonly found in Eastern Christianity. In this instance, the term **Icon of Emmaus** was used by Pope Francis in an address he gave to the bishops of Brazil¹ in July 2013, in which he referred to the story (icon) of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-15) as a key for interpreting the present and the future.

In November 2013, Ruby Almeida and Michael Bennett (Chair and Deputy Chair of Quest) met with Archbishop (now Cardinal) Vincent Nichols of Westminster. As part of a wide-ranging discussion on Quest's relationship with the Church, he suggested to them that it might be useful for Quest to reflect on Pope Francis' words. This suggestion was referred to the Quest national committee and it was agreed that this would be done as a workshop at the next Quest annual conference, held in Scarborough in July 2014.

The Emmaus Story

As part of the advance preparation for the workshop, participants were given the text of Pope Francis' reflection, together with additional reflections on the Emmaus story. One of these summarised the reading by the gay Australian spiritual director Michael B Kelly, who sets it in a wider context than just the usual one of the encounter of two disciples with a 'stranger' as they made their way to Emmaus, and their later recognition of him at a meal. Kelly begins by noting the reasons for the disciples leaving Jerusalem in the first place, noting that in doing so, they were leaving behind their established religious community and its leaders. He also emphasises that after the recognition of the risen Christ at the meal, the disciples rushed back to Jerusalem to spread the good news to the rest of their religious community. With this reading, Kelly uses "Jerusalem", the religious base of the first Christian disciples and their leaders, as a metaphor for "Rome", the equivalent for modern Catholics. He suggests that at times, disillusioned Catholics may feel a need to journey away from Jerusalem / Rome, but if they do, it remains possible to encounter the risen Christ outside the city.

¹ Text of the full address is available on the Vatican website:
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmg-episcopato-brasile.html

If and when they do, he argues, they have a duty likewise to return to Jerusalem / Rome, and to share with the designated leaders of the Church their experience of Him.

Workshop Structure

After an introduction of the subject and process, the conference divided into groups, and asked to reflect and then share their personal experience of Quest and of the Church, and to consider where in the Emmaus story they saw themselves. Participants were provided with post-it notes, on which they were asked to write down brief notes on three questions:

- How has Quest helped (or hindered) me in my search for God?
- How has the Church helped (or hindered) me in my search for God?
- Where do I see myself in the Emmaus story?

These reflections were not reported back in plenary, but the notes were put on display for all to read, during the lunch break.

On re-convening, the groups reflected and shared their thoughts on the relationship between the bishops and ourselves, under the two headings:

- “What can Quest offer the bishops?”
- “What would Quest like to receive from the bishops?”

The small groups’ conclusions were reported back to the full conference in a plenary.

Recording and Output

It was thought to be important that, as far as possible, the thoughts of the workshop participants should be preserved accurately, and in as much as detail as possible. As noted above, the personal observations from the first session were written on post-it notes, which were collected and kept at the end of the conference. Verbatim transcripts were typed up in digital format, then informally grouped into thematic groups.

For the plenary session, minutes were taken of the verbal presentations. In addition, the flip charts on which the groups recorded their summaries, were preserved.

These detailed notes formed the foundation for a summary report – in the case of the personal experiences and reflections on Emmaus, using the precise words recorded by participants.

Emmaus Workshop: Summary Report

Of all the material that emerged from the workshop, the most inspiring responses were those commenting on the value of Quest (“How has Quest helped me...?”) – and the most dispiriting were those on the damage and hurt inflicted by the Church (“How has the Church hindered me...”). Responses discussing the harmful impact of the Church on gay and lesbian Catholics were partially balanced by at least some recognition of help received.

From this it was concluded that the value of Quest to its members lies in its capacity to provide effective support and healing (as a “field hospital for the wounded”), and its value to the Church lies in its ability to partner with it, in providing effective pastoral support to lesbian and gay Catholics and their families.

Lesbian and Gay Experience of Quest

The wide range of benefits that participants reported they had received from Quest could be informally grouped into the following broad categories:

- Growth in faith / Spirituality
- Safe space / Refuge
- Support / Sharing
- Personal growth / Survival
- Friendship
- Information and Resources

There were almost no negative statements about Quest (but to put these into context, the responses were received only from those attending the conference, and so, presumably, among the most enthusiastic supporters).

Lesbian and Gay Experience of the Church

Participants were far more divided in their experience of the Church, both between themselves, and within themselves. Some reported only negative experiences, a few only positive experiences, and many reported some of each.

The positive experiences fell within the following broad categories:

- Belonging / Community
- Spiritual growth
- Sacramental life
- Pastoral support
- Teaching

The negative experiences can be grouped as follows:

- Teaching / Language
- Rejection/ Exclusion
- Pain/Anger/Guilt
- Dishonesty/ Prevented honesty

Reflections on Emmaus

In reflecting on the Gospel story of Emmaus, participants were asked where they saw themselves in it. Most (but not all) did so in terms of Michael B Kelly's reading, in which "Jerusalem" is used as a metaphor for the modern "Rome". Some reported having never left, some were on the road away, some were meeting Christ at Emmaus, and a few were on the way back to Jerusalem / Rome (i.e. returning to participation in the institutional church).

What Quest Can Offer the Bishops

Implicit in the claim by some that with the help of Quest, they were returning to Jerusalem / Rome, is the message that one important part of what Quest can offer the Catholic Bishops is assistance in encouraging those who have left to return, and those who are thinking of leaving, to stay within the framework of the institutional church.

When this was put to the groups as a specific question, other ideas were proposed, informally grouped into these clusters:

- Quest can be a bridge, or conduit for a two-way communication, between the institutional Church and lesbian and gay Catholics
- Quest has a prophetic role, in teaching the bishops about the realities of gay / lesbian lives, and our faith experience
- Based on that experience, we could offer training, to clergy and schools, on LGBT issues.
- Offering pastoral support to LGBT Catholics
- Quest could be a “critical friend”.

What does Quest expect from the Bishops?

- Recognition and welcome for LGBT Catholics
- Explicit and public pastoral support for LGBT Catholics
- Care and Sensitivity with the use of language
- Face and accept the reality of family and relationship diversity
- Honesty and Integrity
- Fidelity to the Gospel Message

Conclusions

Many lesbian and gay Catholics have been deeply hurt emotionally and even spiritually damaged, from either their experience in the Church, or by perceptions of Church teaching. Although there is recognition by some that a life of faith practised inside the Church is valuable, this may be only conditional, or available only behind closed doors. Others report that instead of offering help in their search for God, their experience of the Catholic Church has been only a hindrance. In contrast, there was strong agreement from the workshop participants, that Quest offers powerful help in this search.

It was therefore concluded that, in addition to its existing value in offering support to lesbian and gay Catholics, there is potential for a new role for the organisation in partnering with the institutional Church, to improve its current pastoral support to lesbian and gay Catholics. This can be done by continuing to offer existing services to members, by acting as a communications bridge

between the LGBT community of England and Wales and the officers of the Church, by acting as a “critical friend”, and by offering training, based on our experience, to clergy, parishioners, and Catholic schools.

The following pages provide, in greater detail, the feedback from the participants in the workshops.

1. Emmaus Report: Experience of Quest

“How has Quest helped me in my search for God?”

Of all the material that came out of the workshop, the responses on the value of Quest (“How has Quest helped me...?”) were the most inspiring to read, showing how Quest is seen as a source of personal growth, especially spiritual growth, and also as a refuge from deep pain and attack. Quest fulfils its role by offering pastoral support, a space for spiritual growth, and information. It is also seen as valuable for the simple human friendships that Quest members develop with each other.

Some of the most impressive responses were important not for the detail of what was said, but for their depth of emotion:

- “Quest is ‘life-affirming’”
- “Quest conference for me is life-affirming and re-energises me”
- “Such an amazing necessary organisation”
- “Quest has enriched my life for the better”

Quest as a “field hospital for the wounded”

In a powerful image, Pope Francis has expressed his desire that the Church should be a “field hospital for the wounded”. It is clear that many of the workshop participants would see Quest in precisely this way. The importance of this role is seen from the depth of emotion revealed by the choice of words in many responses, as in these examples:

- “Quest has been, and continues to be, a lifeline for me. It has saved my life.”
- “Freed me up!”

In other words, Quest is perceived as a valuable safe space and refuge from attack. The questions then arise:

- 1) From what or from whom is this attack coming?
- 2) What is the nature of the wounds that require healing?

As lesbian and gay people, discrimination and more serious hurt is sometimes experienced in the outside world, but as LGBT+ Catholics, it is disturbing to note

that the responses made clear that the wounds that need to be healed, are those inflicted by the Church itself. This was spelt out in more detail under the question, “How has the Church helped or hindered me?” (see next section, below), but was also raised spontaneously under the question, “How has Quest helped or hindered me?”

- “A safe space for openness”
- “It is a place of unconditional love and acceptance”
- “It gives a place to share / talk about the pain of rejection by the Church”

Quest Provides Mutual, Pastoral Support

The primary means by which Quest offers this healing, is by functioning – as so many other mutual support groups – by providing the means for people to talk openly about their experiences. Some people are helped by listening to others’ experiences, others (or at other times) by talking themselves, which helps to release powerful emotions such as these:

- “Given me the duty / responsibility to support fellow alienated people”
- “Helpful to meet people who are the same as each other in some respects but different in other respects.”
- “Quest is a “home” and “family” for me.”
- “Emotional release / opportunity to give testimony”
- “A vehicle to vent anger”
- “Quest put me in touch with other gay people who were more experienced in being open about being gay (from whom) I’m learning.”

Quest Provides Growth in Faith / Spirituality

Quest is a specifically Catholic organization, with a stated aim “to sustain and increase Christian belief among homosexual men and women”. (Quest Constitution, clause 1b)² It is clear from many of the responses that growth in faith and spirituality is precisely one of the ways in which members have been helped by Quest.

² References throughout this document to the Quest Constitution relate to that published with amendments on 16th July 2000.

In some cases, this has been by strengthening or reinforcing existing faith, in others has been by helping to rebuild faith that had been faltering – and in some cases, by drawing into the Church people who had not previously been Catholic until meeting up with Quest.

- “Provide access to a wide range of retreats / spiritual enrichment”
- “Has helped me to enrich my faith and practice consistently”
- “I have begun to say / attend morning and evening prayer, and ambition to attend weekday Mass”
- “Quest allowed me to become a Catholic and feel no conflict between my faith and sexuality”
- “Re-energises me and my faith”
- “Opportunity to develop my faith”
- “Quest provides invaluable spiritual, pastoral & social support”
- “My local Quest group has been exceptionally helpful in building on my access to God. I probably might have managed without them but, thank you God for leading me to them at a time when, more than ever, I sought spiritual guidance”

Information and Resources

One of the means by which Quest aims to achieve its goal to “sustain and increase Christian belief among homosexual men and women” is by “providing opportunities for them to meet together for worship, discussion and study”. (Constitution, 1(b)(i)).

Although less prominent in the workshop responses than those discussed above, there were several mentions of the value of such discussion and study. (“Discussion” includes both emotional support, as covered above, and also the discussion of ideas).

- “Given me an intellectual basis for my sexuality”
- “Theology”
- “Excellent inspirational lectures”
- “Quest website is a helpful contact throughout the year”
- “Conference”

Quest offers friendship, fellowship

Finally, one more element in the way Quest has helped members in their search for God, is said to have been in the opportunities it offers to develop simple human friendships.

- “Quest has offered and given me companionship, benefitted me socially”

2. Emmaus Report: Experience of Church (1) – Help

“How Has the Church Helped Me in My Search for God?”

Participants were far more divided in their experience of the Church, both between themselves, and within themselves. Some reported only negative experiences, a few only positive experiences, and many reported some of each.

The positive experiences can be thought of as falling in the following broad groups:

- Belonging / Community
- Spiritual growth
- Sacramental life
- Pastoral support
- Teaching

Church Provides Community

The value of friendship, as discussed above for Quest, is not independent of faith considerations: community is an important part of the Christian ideal. “Community” was also noted as one of the benefits derived from the wider Church. For some, this was simply as a matter of a sense of belonging, or cultural identity, and found God in community rather than alone

- “Given me a vision / cultural identity in its ideals”
- “Sense of belonging”

For others, it was found more directly at parish level, by active participation in parish life.

Church has helped me in journey with God through social / spiritual groups to share faith with. Fantastic, enriching community at local level

Church Provides Pastoral support

Some respondents had found valuable and effective pastoral support at local, parish level – but this is qualified, as being only “behind closed doors”.

At an impersonal but important level, other have found inspiration and encouragement from the words of Pope Francis:

- “On a one-to-one pastoral level, I’ve had enormous support”
- “I’m becoming more aware of gay /gay empathetic people in the church. I’m not so bothered with the hierarchy”
- “Support is available behind closed doors, Pope Francis a shining example for us.
- “I Believe Pope Francis will pave the way for slow change”

Church Aids in Spiritual growth and Sacramental Life

Lesbian and gay people are not the only ones who derive help from the Church, nor are their needs only those connected with sexuality. In common with the wider community, they also need and get help with spiritual growth and faith formation.

- “From within the church, my sense of God’s love developed and this has remained unshaken & therefore contributed to my sense of self – acceptance. I doubt that my “sense” of God could have developed without the church”
- “The church has always helped me in my relationship with God – through the sacraments, holy people, spiritual writings, monastic life. lives of saints”
- “Becoming a Catholic has been unexpected but generally a great help in my journey”
- “Church has helped me in journey with God through spiritual groups”
- “I’m grateful that the Church has introduced me to God, Christ, the Saints, Spiritual Life, and communities of believers”
- “Given me a structure and forum to participate in prayer and worship of God and Christ”
- “My life of the faith comes from the church. I would not be a Christian without it”
- “Ritual”

It is disturbing to note though, that for some people, this help was only available “in the past”, or “while I conformed” as in the following comments:

- “It started me on a journey and whilst I conformed, it fed me”

- “Not recognised me as I am but has in the past helped me on my spiritual path”

Teaching

One notable area in which most Catholics expect to find help and guidance from the Church, but our participants did not, is that of Church teaching. It was remarkable that the only reference to teaching or doctrine that any respondents mentioned as a “help in my search for God”, was a single word, “scripture”.

Teaching and doctrine were mentioned under the heading “hindered me in my search for God” which is covered in the next section.

3. Emmaus Report: Experience of Church (2) – Hindrance

Lesbian and Gay Experience of Church: “How Has the Church Hindered Me?”

Most respondents (but not all) reported on a wide range of negative experiences or perceptions of the Church, things which had “hindered them in their search for God”. These negative experiences can be informally grouped into the clusters:

- Pain/Anger/Guilt
- Teaching / Language
- Rejection/ Exclusion
- Dishonesty/ Prevented honesty

Church as a source of powerful, negative emotion

It was noted above that one aspect of the value of Quest is that it is seen as a source of healing, as a “field hospital for the wounded”. A number of our participants described powerful, emotional wounds as inflicted by the Church itself. Some of those who have not experienced this pain on their own account, said that they are saddened by the pain they see that others have experienced:

- “Made me angry with the Church (anger at Church, not God)”
- “Guilt complex, fear of going to hell, just of how I’ve been born”
- “Never at complete peace being in a relationship with another man. Guilt at not being married to woman, having children as if I’m wasting life”
- “Resentment and anger hard to let go of”
- “Riddled with Catholic guilt”
- “Bigoted uncaring none loving establishment”
- “Angry at prejudices others have received”
- “Becoming a Catholic has been unexpected but sometimes makes me feel like a child who does not quite know why her parents are so angry”

The Church's Hurtful Language

These emotions and hurts derive particularly from the language that is used in talking about lesbian and gay lives (as also noted, according to reports, by some bishops at the 2014 Family and Marriage Synod):

- "Official teaching has deeply upset and made me angry"
- "Confusing – told I'm loved and told disordered"
- "Malevolently phrased documents"
- "'An abomination' in confession"
- "'Official' policy on LGBT negative and 'dumped' no end of guilt"
- "Truths expressed in outmoded images and language"

The Church's Perceived "Exclusion" of LGBT People

The pain and hurt also arise from a sense of exclusion, of having been driven away from the Church, actively, or because they no longer found that sense of belonging, or because they found that acceptance and welcome in the Church community had become conditional.

It's particularly disturbing to note that for one person, the rejection experienced had been not only from the Church, but even from her/his own family – encouraged to do so, by the "Church".

- "Robbed me of Mass"
- "Robbed me of Our Lord's Prayer"
- "When I started to come out, it's love became conditional"
- "Only given conditional acceptance (don't act on your sexuality)"
- "Church has actively turned my family against me"

4. Emmaus Report: Reflections on the Emmaus Story

In reflecting on the Gospel story of Emmaus, participants were asked where they saw themselves in it. Most (but not all) did so in terms of Michael B Kelly's reading, in which "Jerusalem" is used as a metaphor for the modern "Rome". Some reported having never left, some were on the road away, some were meeting Christ at Emmaus, and a few were on the way back to Jerusalem / Rome (i.e., returning to participation in the institutional church).

This range of positions is important, in understanding the task of Quest, which defines its purpose as:

associating lay men and women who are seeking ways of reconciling the full practice of their Catholic faith with the full expression of their homosexual natures in loving Christian relationships, and providing opportunities for them to meet together for worship, discussion and study; (Constitution, 1 (b) (i))

Still in Jerusalem (the Church)

Some of our people see themselves as still within the Church. They have never left, but nevertheless may experience some discomfort with their position. They should be supported and encouraged in their decisions to stay.

- "In Jerusalem still – hopeful, not despondent"
- "Disappointed, confused, worried – asking myself: Now what? But I'm still in Jerusalem asking the above"
- "I have never left Jerusalem. I try to be with the rest of the group and I am most of the time. Sometimes I'm away sitting in a corner"
- "I am in Jerusalem – never left – continue to struggle with being there but faith and hope keeps me there"

On the Road to Emmaus, After Leaving Jerusalem (the Church)

Others have left, or are leaving, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, who may have left Jerusalem and their religious leaders in disillusionment or disappointment. We must understand and respect their decisions.

- "Just leaving Jerusalem"

- “I am one of the despairing disciples – wishing the Church to follow Jesus more clearly in love and service to and for all”
- “Walking away from the hierarchy of the Catholic church. I am still walking with my brothers and sisters in God’s church”
- “Firmly left Jerusalem on the way to Emmaus”
- “On the way to Emmaus. I experience myself sometimes (mostly) as one of the disciples – confused, disillusioned, sad, angry and disappointed: with the Catholic Church today! Because of its attitude and behaviour towards LGBT people, women, the separated and divorced”

In Emmaus, Meeting Christ

Leaving the institutional church does not imply abandoning all religious faith. Just as the disciples were able to meet the risen Christ outside of Jerusalem, some of our people report that they too, have been finding Christ outside the parameters of the institutional church. Their spiritual needs must be supported. It is shown above how Quest is doing precisely that, as is required by its constitution (1 (b) (i)).

- “I have experienced the New Creation of the Holy Spirit and been welcomed as a gay person”
- “With Christ carrying his story. Not having lost faith. Still believing”
- “At the table with the risen Christ, strengthened and loved by God, secure in that love, but currently afraid to return to Jerusalem not ready or even willing to return but might do”
- “Not sure if I can walk back. Do I care anymore?”

Returning to Jerusalem (the Church)

Just as the disciples in the story returned to Jerusalem to meet again with their religious leaders, some of our workshop participants saw themselves as returning to the Church from which they had previously grown apart (actively, or emotionally).

- “One of the travellers who now carry a responsibility to take the newly revealed truth to a wider constituency”
- “Walking back to Jerusalem: scared with the responsibility of what changes may be needed to bravely live the gospel and live an ‘authentic life’”

- “It may be that I, in my ‘not being in the church’, am actually on my way back to Jerusalem having rediscovered Christ”
- “Emmaus – I am almost back in Jerusalem but hovering, talking to people I can identify with on the outskirts. Recognizing Jesus in the communities I have been with has been helpful”

In doing so, they hope to engage in a dialogue to express their experience of meeting with Christ – and their experiences of rejection that had led to their earlier disengagement. This too, is required by the Quest constitution:

establishing and extending a dialogue between homosexual Catholics and members of the clergy through which the insights and experiences of each may gradually be interwoven and so achieve better mutual understanding both of the moral teachings of the Church and of the characteristics of its homosexual members.

Other responses

The discussion above has been presented in a framework of the reading of the story presented by Michael B Kelly, because that is how many of the workshop participants presented their views.

Not everybody used this framework, and the story does not necessarily end with the return to Jerusalem / the institutional church. One response was particularly disturbing, for the account of what happened after he attempted to return:

- “I’ve been to Emmaus, I’ve turned back. We were rejected again. GOD bless Quest”

These are the other responses, not fitting Kelly’s model:

- “I joined the Church after discovering Quest – that was my journey to Emmaus”
- “I’m suspicious of Vincent Nichol’s suggestion that we should reflect on this story. Are we supposed to conclude that we were mistaken?”
- “I really don’t know. I am possibly a traveller wondering who the couple are and seeing how they offered hospitality to a 3rd person. Felt that I would like to be invited to join their company”

- "It depends: Quest could be the unrecognized Jesus; the bishops [are] the two on the way to Emmaus"
- "On a journey"
- "Following my own path to God. Aware that God loves me"
- "On a never-ending journey. Hope I will rediscover & accept the grace to have and trust in my spirituality and others' spirituality. Need to have more confidence in my God – given abilities & talents so I can leave a legacy to society and mankind"

5. Emmaus Report: What Quest Can Offer the Bishops

After some sharing personal experiences of Quest and the Church, and reflecting on their own place in the Emmaus story, the workshop groups discussed the ways in which they believed Quest could assist the Catholic bishops in their task, and then what they would like to receive from the bishops.

The reports from these small groups to the subsequent plenary session were recorded, and are summarized below under these headings.

- A communication channel
- Prophetic Experience
- Teaching and training
- Pastoral Support
- Other

Quest Can Be a Communication Channel

- “To offer the Church a channel of communication with an experienced and vibrant group”
- “Engagement is a 2-way process. It relates to both sides”
- “Bridge back to young LGBT Catholics/schools. Followed by invitations to go into schools”
- “LGBT VOICE – We are the voice”
- “Enabling, To create a space for goodwill / dialogue/ listening to flourish”
- “Right To Be Heard – We are the Church and so have a right to be heard”
- “Vehicle Of Expression And Reporting”

Quest Can Be a Prophetic Witness, Based on our Experience

- “Our stories: living tradition of being LGBT People of Faith”
- “Prophetic role of ‘critical friend’. We have been through it and survived and are still here and believe in Jesus”
- “Witness to ‘gospel’ in face of condemnation”
- “Enabling to create a space for goodwill / dialogue/ listening to flourish”
- “Our experience as LGBT Catholics”

- “Experience – We have years of experience – often this experience as it relates to the Church has been painful experience”
- “Experience. – as integrated embodied people”
- “Storytelling / Life Stories . Chair of Quest to take along 5 members of Quest who could each tell their story when there is a further meeting with Bishop”
- “Quest gives witness that same-sex relationships are an expression of God’s love”
- “Quest bears witness to so many people carrying/showing the scars of ecclesial cruelty”
- “To offer our experience of being gay – separate from being Catholic”
- “A more embodied approach to Christianity”
- “Positive experience of equal loving LGBT relationships”
- “Recognition that God loves everyone the way that God has created them”
- “Experience of parenting in LGBT relationship(s) / families”

Quest Can Provide Teaching and Training

- “Quest to offer itself to wider Church for training / experience in LGBT issues. Look at mission statement”
- “Input to training of priests on LGBT issues”
- “Deeper understanding of human sexuality and relationships which can benefit wider church”
- “Bishops’ disciples – educating and informing”
- “We are the voice: in parishes, in schools”

Quest Already Provides Pastoral Support

- “Linkline experience”
- “Supportive community of disciples”
- “Pastoral support and ministry to each other”
- “Marginalisation > strength from each other”
- “Faithful community”
- “Quest experience of providing pastoral and spiritual support to LGBT Catholics”
- “LGBT Place within the Catholic Place affirmed. Need to stress LGBT people have a place”
- “Embodiment of the Gospel. Christ is present amongst us”

- “Coming together as a group”

and could also offer support to gay priests:

- “We can offer support to lots of gay clergy”
- “Support for gay clergy”

Other

- “Critique – challenge distorted stereotypes”
- “Catholics who sing. We have lively, spirited meetings. Joy in the face of affliction”
- “Ecumenical Dimension”
- “National presence at local level”
- “‘Trade off’ authentic experience. If sharing with bishops – they need to give and to recognise our experience”

Evangelising

Groups pointed out in their feedback at this point that need to remember that we are part of a very small group. That Christians are a very small group in this country. We can be a place where we can draw people into faith.

- “‘Meet us, know us, journey with us’. This links to the Emmaus story”

This is our response to the request for response to the story:

- “Not to have the head separated from the heart. Life is messy and not so clearly divided. So must talk about relationships and not focus on just the sexual dimension”
- “Who Is Walking Away From Jerusalem? Them Or Us?”

6. Emmaus Report: What does Quest Seek to Receive from the Bishops?

After discussion on what the groups believed Quest could offer the bishops, attention turned to what we would like in turn, to receive from them.

Responses to this point are grouped here under the headings:

- Recognition and Welcome
- Learn from. Acknowledge Diversity
- Compassionate, Sensitive Language
- Explicit, Open Pastoral Support
- Honesty and Integrity
- Fidelity to the Gospel

Recognition and Welcome

Probably the most important thing that Quest hopes for from the bishops of the Church, is simply something already promised in many Church documents: recognition that we exist, that our orientation is entirely natural, and that we have every right to feel as much part of the Church, and to be fully welcomed, as much as the heterosexual majority. This might appear trite, but its importance is underlined by the overwhelmingly common actual experience of rejection described earlier, either directly at local level, or indirectly in the documents and public statements of the Church and its bishops.

There was furthermore a clear desire that this welcome should be more than just silent acceptance. (Silence, in this context, can easily be interpreted as a form of rejection). Instead, the need is for a welcome that is explicit and public, as is current practice at the Farm Street parish. This is discussed further below, under “Pastoral Support”):

- “Welcome, not ‘tolerated’ Fully welcoming”
- “Permission to be visible – officially – as an organisation and as individuals”
- “Recognition of our existence and the support we offer”
- “Acceptance that LGBT people exist in laity, clergy, bishops and church hierarchy”

- “Take a lead to make parishes / members more LGBT accepting”

This clear message of welcome and support can be demonstrated in deliberate, open pastoral support, and by improvements to the language that is used by bishops, pastors and other church representatives when speaking to or about LGBT people.

Explicit, Public Pastoral Support

It was noted above that personal experience of the Church has found that effective pastoral support for lesbian and gay Catholics is “sometimes” available, but only “behind closed doors”, and can be only conditional. A common theme from our working groups, was a desire that such pastoral support should be much more widely available (even in every parish), should be open and public, so that those in need of it would know that it exists.

It should be noted here that the best government estimates of the numerical incidence of LGBT people, is that they comprise something like 6% of the adult population. By that measure, any Catholic parish will have within its borders, 60 lesbian or gay people for every 1000 adult residents. That the actual number of lesbian or gay people known in our parishes probably arises from two factors: that many lesbian and gay Catholics have simply left the Church (as discussed above), or continue to belong and participate, but feel constrained to hide their sexuality. If 6% of adults in a parish are lesbian or gay, there will be rather more than that, of people with lesbian or gay close family members. They too need pastoral support.

Much of this pastoral support must necessarily be put in place at local level, but our hope is that bishops will take a lead in urging and guiding the parishes, publicly and in guidance to parish priests and pastoral councils. (It was noted above that Quest would be able and willing to assist in this, both with direct support, and with training to parishes).

- “Encouragement to parishes to welcome LGBTs in their parish road-map to inclusion”
- “Affirming identity welcome statements in parishes, resources made freely available”

- “Statements must include specific mention of LGBT people”
- “To promote acceptance of LGBT people”
- All the sacraments to be open to all including LGBT people and anyone/any clergy who has spoken in support of gay rights”
- “No denial of communion to LGBT people”
- “Be concerned with who people are not what they may do. Total validity – not just focus on one aspect of a person. (i.e. sexual) overseeing the ‘whole’ person”
- “Pastoral Responsibility”
- “More Contact – to appoint a liaison officer (in diocese? In parish?) – have monthly meetings”
- “We want a consistent approach across the board; not just gay friendly/ appropriate masses in London”
- “Proper recognition, support, funding and DELIVERING the leaflets”
- “This group acknowledged that some priests might visit LGBT people or be supportive of them but what the group wanted was that that support was stated. They wanted the priest to be free to proclaim that support formally. They wanted to hear it ‘from the pulpit’”
- “Support for LGBT pupils in Catholic schools”
- “Pastoral support and resources across all parishes re LGBT issues. Each parish to have a gay chaplain”
- “Practical strategies for people in leadership roles to implement measures to educate / train on LGBT issues”
- “Visits by bishops at forthcoming Conferences as sign of listening/ dialogue”

Use More Sensitivity and Compassion and Respect in the Choice of Language

Church teaching demands that we use “respect, compassion and sensitivity” when dealing with lesbian and gay people, and we note that there was some discussion at the 2014 Family Synod on the problems with using hurtful language. Sadly, this “sensitivity and respect” is not always apparent in practice. This was clearly an issue for many of our people, who described the reasons that language is important, and gave examples of especially hurtful terminology that should be particularly avoided.

It was suggested that a useful principle with language when talking about us, is to use the language we use ourselves – and was noted that this was Pope Francis' own practice, in a famous example:

- “Use of language is important – they transmit messages”
- “Not ‘nuclear-family’ oriented”
- “No labelling, not discriminative inferences being made, no preconceived ideas of how we live our lives”
- “Labels imply meanings and perceptions that are inaccurate”
- “Language used by Church needs to change”
- “Specifically, get rid of ‘intrinsically disordered’.
- “Do not use ‘love the sinner, hate the sin’”
- “Don’t patronise LGBT people in the use of language (‘living with same-sex attraction’)”
- “Use non-condemnatory language”
- “Use word ‘GAY’ openly, following Pope Francis’ example”
- “They need to listen to the language we use”

Learn from and Acknowledge Diversity

The Catechism tells us that our sexuality is an important part of our human make-up, which should be fully integrated into our personalities. Church teaching also accepts that for some people, same-sex affectional orientation is entirely appropriate, and that for these people, neither attempts to alter their natural orientation, nor heterosexual marriage, are recommended. But in discussions of relationships, marriage and family, bishops and church documents are perceived to talk exclusively in terms of a binary divide between men and women, and heterosexual relationships between them.

In addition to the naturally occurring diversity of sexuality and gender, in the modern world, there also exists extensive diversity in family structure (as was noted at the 2014 Family Synod). We would like to see greater understanding and public recognition by the bishops, that such sexual and gender diversity simply exists – and more evidence of genuine “respect, compassion and sensitivity” as is promised in the Catechism.

- “Ministry of the Couple. Ideals of marriage to be found in a range of relationships”
- “Embrace church members who do not fit into ‘nuclear family’ model”
- “Nurturing, all-encompassing nature of relationships”
- “Stress the diversity of families. LGBT are not the only ones who don’t fit the ‘expected’ pattern and therefore feel excluded”
- “(Research has found) only 30% of households comprised nuclear families and therefore 70% did not”
- “Recognition of civil partnerships”
- “Recognition of family diversity”

One group noted that to improve their current limited understanding of this reality, bishops should:

- “Listen authentically to models of relationships and lived experience. We have actually lived this experience and we can all (including church leaders) learn from varied models of human experience. Need to deal with people’s actual experience; not how church leaders with no(?) experience of relationships think [that] people live. ‘Get real’ – not just in relation to LGBT people”

Honesty and Integrity

There were some references to expectations of honesty on the part of the bishops and pastors, both in respect of relationships with lesbian and gay people, and in respect of themselves.

We would prefer, as stated above, open and explicit welcome, recognition, and pastoral support. However, if this not be forthcoming, some people were saying, it would be preferable to be told so directly, rather than to hear encouraging noises without action.

As one group put it:

- “do not be ambiguous... i.e. Be honest and straightforward. So, if not ready to accept LGBT people as valid and full members of the Catholic community, then say so outright. Groups did not want to be put off by delaying or confusing tactics like ‘go away and look at this further text...’”

The expectation of honesty also applies to honesty about the clergy. It is well known that a substantial proportion of Catholic priests themselves have a same-sex affectional orientation, but this is not publicly acknowledged by the Church. In Quest, many of us have learned from experience that coming out publicly can be an experience of emotional, psychological growth and even spiritual growth. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate to our friends and families something of the truth of what being gay actually is, beyond the stereotypes and myths. On the contrary, we also know that remaining in the closet is damaging to our mental health. Coming out is a simple act of integrity and honesty.

Yet this positive experience is generally not available to our priests, very few of whom dare to disclose their orientation publicly, and especially not priests working in parishes. Yet, in the very few isolated examples that have been reported from the USA, Ireland and a few elsewhere, the reaction of the parishioners has been strongly supportive of the priests for their honesty.

- “Acknowledge that priests are gay”
- “Public policy of support for openly gay clergy”

Fidelity to the Gospel

For some of the groups, there was a concern that Catholic bishops are not necessarily being faithful to the Gospel. For some, this arose from a perception of a constant harping on questions of sex (which are not prominent in the Gospels). For others, some bishops are seen as careerist, more interested in their own welfare, than in following the example of Jesus Christ (a tendency that Pope Francis has warned against).

- “Stop Focusing On Morals + Sex”
- “Get Back To Message Of The Gospels”
- “Keep noses out of people’s bedrooms. Obsession with sexual aspects of relationship needs to stop”
- “Christ-like models / leaders – some are ‘careerists’”

Other

Catholic teaching is that lesbian and gay people should not be subjected to unjust discrimination, and that they should be protected from all forms of

violence and malice, in actions or in words. Our groups noted that it would be helpful to see some signs of these worthy sentiments being put into practice by our bishops, and by the Vatican.

The Church itself practices discrimination against lesbian and gay Catholics, for example in employment practices. We also do not see evidence of Catholic bishops speaking out against direct persecution of LGBT people in some parts of the world – where even some bishops themselves have actively advocated for legal persecution.

Equal Opportunities

The point was made that the Church had opted out of the Equality Act. This meant that it was possible to sack gay RE teachers in Catholic schools. Clearly this is a major issue in relation to the experience of LGBT teachers in Catholic schools.

- “Equal opportunities to LGBT people in education and parishes”
- “Active condemnation of death and other penalties for LGBT people throughout the world”

Finally, while it is noted that in some respects there have been some improvements in the way the Church is responding to us, it was felt by some (reported by two small groups), that what would be appreciated, is an apology or statement of regret for the treatment meted out in the past.

- “Apology – a statement of regret for way Church has treated LGBT people in the past”

7. Emmaus Report: Conclusions

It is clear from the personal reflections that the overwhelming majority of Quest members at the 2014 Conference felt in some way personally damaged or even rejected by the Church or, if not, aware of the hurt experienced by others, and pained in sympathy with them.

In some cases, this hurt has been experienced directly and personally, but in others, people have found good welcome and support at local, parish level. More often, these perceptions of hurt have come from the language used in Church documents or public statements. They may even arise from a contradiction at the heart of Catholic teaching on homosexuality.

One of our members, Terence Weldon, has noted at his blog, **“Queering the Church”**, that although the Catechism recognizes that sexuality is an important part of our human make -up, which should be acknowledged, accepted, and integrated into our personality by an intimate, loving relationship with another person – this is only available, in church teaching, to those able to do so with a person of the opposite sex. Furthermore, for gay and lesbian Catholics, coming out and publicly acknowledging our same – sex affectional orientation is an act of personal honesty and integrity, consistent with the Catechism of the Catholic Church to “acknowledge and accept” our sexuality, this is contradicted by the Church argument that anti-discrimination legislation is not needed, because this can be avoided if gay people simply do not disclose their orientation.

The Catechism also states:

2358. The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.

The experience of many of our members is that it is not our orientation itself which “constitutes a trial”, but the treatment they have at times experienced at the hands of the Church, its representatives, or those claiming to speak on its behalf. Frequently, there is little evidence of the professed “respect, compassion

and sensitivity”, but quite often, the reverse, Similarly, there is at times a perception that the Church itself is practising the very discrimination that it says should be avoided.

It is perhaps not surprising then, to find that while many of our workshop participants have identified some ways in which the Church has helped them in their search for God, not one mentioned Church teaching in this positive light – and many identified it instead, as having found it a hindrance in that respect.

As a result of these experiences or perceptions of the Church, its language and its teaching, have led a large proportion of our people either to walk away from the institutional and sacramental life of the Church, or to consider doing so. But even those moving away from the Church in hurt or disillusionment, do not mean that they are abandoning God or religious practice. They continue to seek him in spiritual practice, in faith sharing and in acts of worship, if necessary, outside the conventional framework of the institutional Church.

These opportunities for sharing in the practice of our faith, they find in Quest.

Nevertheless, it is also true that many of our members continue to find help and support within the Church, especially at a local, parish level. Just like so many other Catholics, they find nourishment in the sacramental life of the Church, in the help with spiritual growth that it can provide, in community and Christian fellowship they experience, and in the saints of the Church.

We believe that there is much that we can offer, to work in partnership with the Catholic bishops, in offering effective pastoral support to lesbian and gay Catholics of our country. We can do this, by encouraging our members to return to remain active in parish life where they are currently so engaged, or to return to it if they have left – and feel able to do so.

For both those who remain inside, and those who have left but feel unable or unwilling to return, we currently offer, and continue to offer, opportunities for participation in a life of faith, by arranging retreats, acts of worship, and other events (such as the pilgrimage to Walsingham in 2014, and due to be repeated in 2015).

We offer, through our annual conference and regional gatherings, community fellowship and pastoral support. We also offer and will continue to offer, information and resources to enable our members to grow in their knowledge and understanding of both their faith, and of sexuality. We further believe that there could be new avenues for cooperation with our bishops. These could include, as suggested by our small group discussions, acting as a point of contact and dialogue with the bishops around the country, so that they may be better informed of the actual realities of our lives and relationships, which have little in common with popular stereotypes,

We could also provide similar help in parishes, to priests and parish communities (especially the parents of lesbian and gay children, who are sometimes deeply troubled by these issues) and assistance in Catholic schools.

Such are the results and conclusions from the workshop. It remains to be said something of the process. On the day, it was striking to hear the reactions of participants who had found the experience of talking about these things both difficult, but also healing and helpful in itself.

The process of sifting through and analysing these responses has similarly been helpful to us as an organisation. It is to be hoped that these findings will help to bring greater clarity to us in assessing our future role and priorities – and that they will at the same time be helpful to the bishops of England and Wales in assessing the degree (and manner) of future co-operation with Quest they are willing to accept, in expanding ministry to the lesbian and gay Catholics of our country.