

One SACRED community

The Congregation of St. Joseph believes in and respects the God-given dignity of all life. We act in solidarity with all those who are marginalized, including those in the LGBTQ+ community. We are called by God to love one another, and with love comes compassion, respect, and sensitivity for others. As a congregation, we are committed to doing the work needed to be allies and to help LGBTQ+ individuals find welcome in our church, communities, and in our world.

As sisters, staff, and partners in mission, we continue to learn and grow around issues of social justice, and work to support all those who have been pushed to the margins. We join Pope Francis in supporting and welcoming our LGBTQ+ siblings. As the Pope said in 2013, "If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?"

Here, we share open conversations and information about the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusion. There's a lot to reflect on in these pages. We hope that they give you new ideas to consider, and that they lead to meaningful conversations.

Want to learn more about how the Congregation of St. Joseph is offering support? Looking for resources to better understand these issues? Visit our website at csjoseph.org/lgbtqsupport/



In partnership with the Congregation of St. Joseph, Sister Erin McDonald, Sister Sarah Simmons, and Kascha Sanor, Director for Social & Environmental Justice for the congregation, attended the 2023 Outreach LGBTQ+ Catholic Ministry Conference in New York City this June. Outreach is an LGBTQ+ Catholic resource which operates under the auspices of America Media, a Jesuit ministry. The conference gathers LGBTQ+ lay people, clergy, scholars, artists, educators, students and family members to build community, share best practices, and worship together. Below, Kascha offers a reflection about her experience at the conference.

"Welcome. God loves you." This is the first message we heard from Father James Martin, SJ at the second annual Outreach Conference.

I had been looking forward to this conference for months! However, amidst hundreds of local and state laws being proposed against LGBTQ+ people, and inconsistent pastoral presence from institutional church leadership, I wasn't sure what the tone of our time together would be. What it could be.

Luckily the welcome from Father James Martin let me know that we were, of course, in good company. Not to mention a welcome letter of support that was sent from Pope Francis himself, offering his "prayers and good wishes" to all participants! The weekend was full of prayer, theological panels, and nuanced conversation about lived experience.



From left are Sister Erin McDonald, Sister Sarah Simmons, Anna Lawler, Father James Martin, SJ, and Kascha Sanor.



Standing with PRIDE

Sisters showed their support for our LGBTQ+ siblings at the Kalamazoo Pride Festival which took place June 2-3 at the Arcadia Creek Festival Place. Thousands attend the annual festival each June to celebrate Pride Month, which commemorates the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City, an uprising that marked the beginning of the movement to end discriminatory laws and practices against LGBTQ+ Americans. Staffing the congregation's table were (top photo) Sisters Pam Owens, Tami Schab, Janet Fleischhacker, and Sue McCrery, and (bottom photo) Sister Mary Ellen Gondeck, seen here talking with an attendee. Not pictured are Sisters Rita Ann Teichman, Marge Bassett, and Kit Kaiser who also attended and helped staff the congregation's table.

One of the most moving moments for me was a panel where three women shared the joys and unique struggles of being a Catholic lesbian. These women were brutally honest about the pain and sadness they experience. One had been fired from teaching at her own alma mater, another kicked out of the house and had fully lost her relationship with her Catholic parents, and all three had grown up thinking they were unworthy of love. These women shared deep spiritual wisdom.

When asked why they remain Catholic, one panelist said: "I'm so thoroughly convinced of God's love for me, that I refuse to leave, because I need everyone else to know God loves them too."

A later panel picked up on this theme as well. How do LGBTQ+ Catholics and those that believe we are all one sacred community, all of us loved by God, sustain their faith when people are condemning and diminishing them in the name of Catholicism? We can follow our conscience, Catholic Social Teaching, and the Congregation of St. Joseph's mission of unioning love, to restore inherent dignity and right relationship with the LGBTQ+ community and the Church.

All three days of this gathering brought deep, meaningful conversation and accompanying joy! We were able to wrestle with scripture, Catholic teaching, and each other's stories, all while staying rooted in hope and resurrection. Rooted in tradition, attuned to the innermost of our being, and in joyful communion with one another, we are free to be one sacred community.

