

From the Pit: Finding Hope Through Grief and Community

Reflection by LGBTQ+ Initiative Team Member Beth Garascia

In the Old Testament, the prophet Jonah, because he was fleeing God's call, and Jeremiah, since his message to King Zedekiah telling the king to surrender was seen as treasonous, both found themselves in a pit. Officials lowered Jeremiah into a muddy cistern to silence him, and Jonah was famously swallowed by a whale. I too have felt recently that I am in a pit because of the US government's actions against the most precious as well as the most vulnerable among us. Immigrants, trans persons, universities, the Earth, and the press are being targeted in different ways. The pit I'm in, not a well or the belly of a whale, and not because I have sent a bold message to a king or refused a call from God, is a psychological sense of hopelessness. The news of a different egregious action being taken each day in a presidential order has a paralyzing effect on me. Everything I imagine doing to protest or help stop these actions seems inadequate.

When, on June 13, the USCCB, along with the Colorado Catholic Conference and the Catholic University of America, took a position at the U.S. Supreme Court, filing a brief endorsing the right of Colorado licensed counselor Kaley Chiles to use conversion therapy, I felt tempted to despair. It was more bad news. This brief was in opposition to Colorado's 2019 Minor Conversion Therapy Law. Conversion therapy is not only unscientific, but it is rooted in the outdated idea that LGBTQ+ people can be "cured." When this case, Chiles VS Salazar, was heard recently on Tuesday, October 7, the Supreme Court appeared largely sympathetic to Chiles. I don't understand why the justices seem ready to give counselors, who are adults with authority, permission to use such a harmful tool under the guise of protecting free speech.

In supporting the Minor Conversion Therapy Law, these Church representatives are failing to protect LGBTQ+ minors from substandard care and are instead allowing a so-called therapy, which has been shown to cause major depression, anxiety, and has led to suicide, to be used by counselors. As attorney Chris Damian wrote in National Catholic Reporter (NCR) on Sept. 4, 2025, the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, tells us "Society has the right to defend itself against possible abuses committed on the pretext of religion." We must speak out against such practices and not allow this "therapy" which has such known negative effects to be used.

Another blow to me was one of Pope Leo's responses to his fear of polarization in the Church. Even though he wants to continue Pope Francis's welcome stance toward LGBTQ+ persons, he says that doctrinal revision is being postponed. According to NCR's September 24 article by Ish Ruiz, last week Pope Leo stated in an interview with Elise Ann Allen, that it "would be 'highly unlikely, certainly in the near future,' that church doctrine on sexuality would change." While in some ways not surprising, this is an indication that the Church is still failing to acknowledge that LGBTQ+ people should not only be welcomed but are a gift to our Catholic community and deserve to be recognized as such. How long will it take for this to happen?

My visceral feeling is that things are not right, those in authority are not keeping their promises to welcome immigrants and those on the margins. So, here I am, in the pit. Jeremiah was rescued from the pit by Ebed-Melech, who told the king the men had done evil by throwing the prophet into the pit. Ebed-Melech was joined by thirty men who pulled Jeremiah out. Jonah, after praying for three days and three nights, was vomited out of the mouth of the whale. Lessons I can glean from these stories reflect the power of community and of prayer.

When I am in the pit, one thing I can do is look is up, reach out to others. How can I make my grief, my anger, transformative? Henri Nouwen tells us, "To become like the Father, whose only authority is compassion, I have to shed countless tears and so prepare my heart to receive anyone, whatever their journey has been, and forgive them from that heart." I think the conclusion from Jonah and from Nouwen is to grieve, prepare my heart to forgive, and to pray. This is how can we love as God loves, and it takes work, patience, and time.

After grieving for what has been lost and acknowledging that things are not right, I am called in these times, along with those in community with me, to love our world, imagining what could be and working for that dream with urgency. Working with a like-minded group, Ebed Melech freed Jeremiah. Let's pray without ceasing and work with those with whom we are in community to find creative ways to answer the call to justice.