

## ***Pride, Faith, and Belonging***

### **Reflection by Team Member Jen Morin-Williamson**

I had the privilege of participating in a virtual Pride Month watch party on June 29 featuring [\*Living Our Marianist Charism: Embracing the LGBTQ+ Community\*](#), a video produced by the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative's LGBTQ+ Initiative and released in 2020. What made the evening especially meaningful was hearing reflections from several LGBTQ+ members and allies who helped create the video and sharing how both their lives and the Church have continued to evolve over the nearly ten years since the project's inception.

As a relatively new member of the LGBTQ+ Initiative, I found the conversation both inspiring and affirming. I have carried a deep love and concern for LGBTQ+ people for decades. I have always believed that every person is created in the image and likeness of God, beloved as God's children without exception, and as worthy as I am of dignity and belonging. Jesus modeled this throughout his life, continually reaching across barriers to welcome those who had been marginalized or excluded.

What stayed with me most were the honest, hopeful stories people shared about how much has changed since the video was released. I was moved by the person who said they once did not feel comfortable being fully themselves in faith settings, and by the man who spoke about the simple joy of attending Mass openly with his partner after years of trepidation. I also appreciated the honesty of the team member who admitted they had once worried that including the story of a married gay couple might be too risky, only to realize later that it became one of the video's strongest choices. As I listened, I kept thinking about how belonging is not abstract; it is something people either feel or do not feel in the communities we create.

Just as powerful was hearing how this work has deepened people's understanding of the Gospel. Several participants spoke about the need to listen more carefully to voices that have too often been ignored and to recognize that our language and understanding of LGBTQ+ people continue to grow. Our response today must be to highlight and affirm the experiences of our trans siblings—not because they need our validation, but because they are experiencing escalating oppression and violence. Trans people also deserve to be seen, heard, and respected. One person said that Jesus' radical love challenged the norms of his time, and that we are called to do the same. Another reflected that Marianist small faith communities have become places of genuine belonging, even as some parishes still struggle to offer that same welcome. All were grateful for the progress that has been made, but also aware of how much more there is to do, especially when even something as simple as a Pride Mass remains out of reach in some places.

I left the evening encouraged by these joyful, faithful people, grateful for their courage, and blessed by their willingness to share their stories. For me, this is a calling to reflect Christ's radical love—a love that refused to exclude, amplified dignity to those pushed aside, and continually widened the circle of belonging. As Marianists, we are invited to do the same today.