

## Testimony for Synodal Study Group 9 on Homosexuality (Portugal)

- **Which aspects of your personal experience do you consider most important to highlight regarding the issue we are discussing (in this case: homosexuality)?**

**Growing in love and sensitivity:** I grew up in a big family, where I'm the second eldest of four brothers and two sisters. It was a very loving and open family, yet the topic of homosexuality was never discussed. The true grace was my mother. Her insistence that my teachers value my sensitivity, my appreciation for poetry, and my gentleness – traits often deemed ‘feminine’ in the 90s – instead of viewing them with fear, was foundational. She fostered an inner confidence that my difference was not a flaw. This parental love was my first, most enduring lesson in self-acceptance and dignity.

**The discovery of sexuality and the anguish of solitude:** My earliest crushes followed the social norms of straight relationships, but as I matured, I realised the intensity of my feelings for some boys was different – a profound blend of intimacy and desire, unlike the warm esteem I felt for girls. Living this in secrecy, outside of what seemed ‘normal’, led to an immense sense of disconnection and profound solitude. The perceived silence or aversion to the topic in social spheres and, crucially, within the Church, forced me into a double life. I wonder if openly shared experiences of gay families would have helped me not to feel so lonely on this path.

**The encounter with Christ and the call to wholeness:** In prayer and at retreats in my adolescence and first years of adulthood, I often felt I was praying alone. Yet, it was in the crucible of this isolation that I began to feel Christ’s fierce, loving call to my integrity and wholeness – to neither hurt myself nor others, for my body was created and loved by God. The path forward was not segregation, but integrating every part of myself into His loving gaze.

**Finding love and peace:** Meeting my now-husband 20 years ago, at the age of 19, was transformative. I finally found someone who shared my core values and internal struggles. Sharing a life of faith, service, and love with him has been the truest expression of myself. My sexuality doesn’t define my life, but it is an intrinsic part of me; without acknowledging it, I cannot be whole.

- **Have you been practically involved in any groups or movements that focus on this issue, and what reflections or insights have you gained from that experience?**

**Seeking wholeness, avoiding segregation:** I actively avoided groups that I felt would segregate me; my deepest desire was simply to find myself and belong. The only experience of groups was the greatest comfort in joining a gay rugby group for six years in my early thirties. It was a space to enjoy a beloved sport without judgment, where my identity was present but the focus was on the activity, not the label. I felt that some Catholic groups still place too much emphasis on the topic of sexuality itself.

**Finding wholeness in the Christian Life Community (CVX):** Eight years ago, I found my home in CVX. I feared misunderstanding, but discovered a space where I have felt completely integrated and myself from day one. Here, we pray on the broad issues of the world – war, poverty, justice –

and bring all the joys and sorrows of our lives to Christ. I am grateful that my sexuality is not treated as a topic of greater relevance than any other challenge we face. It is simply one thread in the rich tapestry of my life. At the same time, I know some friends who were deeply hurt, and the homosexual Christian groups give them the safe space they need to find answers.

**Moving beyond the label into service:** I am so much more than a label. I live my life in profound peace with God, who knows me from my mother's womb. I speak openly about my reality when appropriate, but my purpose and joy are found in service – like my work with children in foster homes – a field that is so dear to me and gives me the chance to use the time I didn't have if I had children of my own. My desire is to be seen not through the lens of my sexuality, but through the whole of my being and my actions.

**Wounds from the Christian community:** I cannot ignore the scars I carry. I have witnessed the devastating effects of 'conversion therapies' and the break-up of families, which felt like an attack on God's sensitive and blameless creation. These experiences deeply hurt, because they target the inherent dignity of a person who simply bears the love of another of the same gender.

- **What is your relationship with Christian communities and with the reality of the Church, and in what ways do you find support or encounter difficulties?**

**The challenge to integrity in Christ:** My spiritual life is anchored in the Eucharist, the daily Examen, and the CVX. I haven't personally faced public confrontation for simple gestures of affection with my husband. However, a decade ago, a Spiritual Director's question hurt me deeply: he suggested I could have been married to a woman to "find peace" and "use my gifts", since marriage is not "just about sexuality". I felt offended: it was a suggestion to harm a woman by robbing her of the chance to be completely loved and desired, all to fulfil a social expectation.

**Bringing everything into the light:** That initial, painful encounter led me to empty my daily prayer, excluding my relationship and affective life from my conversation with Christ. The turning point came when another Director challenged me: "In true friendship and trust, there are no areas where we cannot shine the light of Christ. You are whole." From that moment, I slowly began to bring my full reality back into prayer, into my CVX sharing, and into my professional and family life. The moment I felt it, I shared this image with my group: we are all going to Jerusalem; the road or the deals don't really matter, what matters is the final destination, and traveling without hurting others or God.

**The breakthrough moment came when I realised that Christ was not waiting to condemn my relationship, but was peacefully waiting for me to find him in my secrecy and loneliness.** The real sin was not my love, but my lack of trust in His desire for my fulfilled life. I pray that we all dare to bring our whole lives – our deepest truths – into the light of Christ's love, knowing He wants us to be whole, not broken or hidden.

**Love and acceptance as the starting point:** My current difficulty is that I feel the Church needs to move beyond mere 'welcoming' and 'pity', which should be the obvious foundation. Christ gave us the discernment to go further. We need to proclaim the unspoken truth: God loves you and desires your wholeness. Sexuality is one part of our life, and difference is a hallmark of Creation. Jesus' life proved that Love is greater than all our struggles and conflicts. I wish Church conversations would focus on identifying the concrete differences between us... or, better yet,

seeing that in God's eyes, there are none, because we are all loved. Although living a gay relationship, I truly believe the sign of God in my life was the gifts He gave me of fidelity and courage, required to build a life of shared faith and service with my husband. My marriage, in its constancy and commitment, is a real opportunity to allocate our time and energy to others. This is what we have been doing, day and night.

**The healing power of community:** My husband's family, though loving, made his reality a taboo subject. He is a sign interpreter and works some Sundays per month interpreting Mass in Fatima. He is truly one made of all love for others, family, and nature. But he was seriously hurt by his family, who weren't capable of showing love and empathy to his reality, believing, based on the word of God, that he was living a life of sin. It was only when the family started to witness that we were active Christians in our daily life, noticing as well subtle signs of support and love for the homosexual community coming from the Church in their small Portuguese town, that their hearts began to open. This experience witnesses that even the most discreet gestures of love and acceptance from the Christian community are crucial for family healing and greater social acceptance.