

THE RAINBOW INITIATIVE

Episcopal Migration Ministries Rainbow Initiative: 2023 Retrospective Report





Executive Summary

Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM's) Rainbow Initiative was launched in January 2023 upon the decision of The Episcopal Church in the summer of 2022 to focus specific attention on people who had been forced from their home countries by homophobia and transphobia. During the first six months of the Initiative's operation, EMM established formal partnerships with 21 congregations and other grassroots organizations to bring aid and visibility to LGBTQ+ forced migrants. Together with these partners, who were located throughout the U.S. and in Europe, EMM reached hundreds of thousands of people, mostly through participation in Pride Marches, and through conventional and social media. This first phase was largely dedicated to learning and discernment and included the creation of a dedicated section of EMM's website and the development and dissemination of resources in four main categories: Learn, Pray, Witness, and Serve. The enthusiastic response to the Initiative during its inaugural year bodes well for its continuation, and – resources permitting – expansion, as more partners become ready to provide the welcome, direct support, and advocacy that are so desperately needed by LGBTQ+ forced migrants.

This report includes highlights of EMM's work through the Rainbow Initiative but is not exhaustive. It does not include, for example, much of the activity undertaken by EMM's partners in this work, or the activities that other ministries of The Episcopal Church (e.g., the Office of Government Relations) have carried out on behalf of LGBTQ+ forced migrants.

The origins and context of the Rainbow Initiative

The Rainbow Initiative was created in response to [2022 General Convention Resolution D045](#), which resolved that The Episcopal Church should focus attention on “persons forced to seek refugee or asylee status because they fear being persecuted based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and/or sex characteristics.” The resolution includes a “request that Episcopal Migration Ministries highlight the issues surrounding LGBTQI+ refugees and asylees and offer information on ways of support...” and refers to advocacy directed towards intergovernmental organizations and the United States Government. The person who proposed D045 (Janet Day-Strehlow) and one of the people who endorsed it (Sinead Doherty) have been active in planning and implementing the Rainbow Initiative.

In accordance with its mission, EMM's plan for the Rainbow Initiative focused primarily on working with Episcopal congregations and other organizations at the grassroots level. Major elements of the plan included building a national network of relevant groups to focus on LGBTQ+ forced migrants; developing and providing educational and worship resources to those groups and their members; raising awareness of LGBTQ+ forced migration within The Episcopal Church more broadly; and encouraging activity centered on June 2023, including Pride Month and World Refugee Day (June 20th) events. To pursue these priorities, EMM also networked with colleague organizations at the national and international levels. Finally, the plan included a period of reflection and planning to

¹ “LGBTQ+” is the term standardly used in The Episcopal Church to refer to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, or who identify with some other term that distinguishes them from heterosexual and/or cisgender. A “forced migrant” is someone who is compelled to leave their country of citizenship or origin because of persecution or war. They may be designated as “refugees,” “asylum seekers,” “asylees,” “undocumented immigrants,” or with some other terminology, depending on how they relate to the immigration system of the country where they are located.



follow June 2023. This report and the related planning document are intended to crystallize that reflection and planning.

Context²

It is illegal to be LGBTQ+ in about 70 countries, and 11 now prescribe the death penalty. In many more countries, physical attacks, and murder against LGBTQ+ people go unprosecuted. Religion is used to justify much of the persecution that LGBTQ+ people face worldwide. At the same time, many LGBTQ+ people who have been persecuted remain religious themselves, and much of the help that they receive is motivated by religion.

If they reach the U.S., LGBTQ+ forced migrants are more likely to be asylum seekers (about 30,000 per year) or undocumented immigrants than they are to be refugees (about 1,000 per year). These technical differences are important because asylum seekers are unable to work legally for at least 180 days after they have filed their asylum application, and they are ineligible for many government-funded benefit programs. Undocumented immigrants also face these challenges. However, individuals admitted to the U.S. as refugees arrive with immediate work authorization, access to various public assistance programs, and a pathway to citizenship.

Many LGBTQ+ people are alienated from the social support systems that most forced migrants depend on to survive, such as their families and ethnic community associations. This social isolation, coupled with the lack of work authorization, makes them particularly vulnerable to homelessness, extreme poverty, and exploitation.

Nevertheless, LGBTQ+ forced migrants are often strong, determined, and hopeful; successfully fleeing from persecution requires enormous strength and determination. They bring their talents and energy to their new communities. And throughout their journeys towards safety, they are driven by hope for a better future.

“Internally displaced people” have fled persecution but remain within their country of citizenship. Many LGBTQ+ Americans can relate to this experience and have relied on Episcopal and other congregations to provide them with a warm welcome in their new communities. This same welcome is extremely important for people who have had to cross international borders to reach safety.

Planning

EMM began planning what would become the Rainbow Initiative soon after the conclusion of General Convention in July 2022. In August, Allison Duvall (Senior Manager of Church Relations and Engagement) and Kendall Martin (Senior Communications Manager) began discussing possibilities with Max Niedzwiecki, Ph.D., who would later become the Initiative’s consultant, working on a pro bono basis.

² See: Niedzwiecki, Max. (2023). [We Shall Overcome: A Case Study of the LGBT Asylum Task Force, a Parish Ministry](#). In Goździak, E.M., Main, I. (eds), *Debating Religion and Forced Migration Entanglements. Politics of Citizenship and Migration*. Palgrave Macmillan.



By mid-December 2022, the Rainbow Initiative team had arrived at the following basic plan.

| Planned activity areas | Planned dates | Actual vs. planned activity; see further sections of report for details |
|--|---------------|---|
| <i>Survey and other outreach:</i> Conduct an online survey to get feedback and begin building a network. Conduct outreach through other means. | Jan-Feb | Consistent with plan; survey period extended to early March |
| <i>Fundraising</i> | Jan-Feb | Not pursued due to limited timeframe and the need to coordinate with other TEC/EMM priorities |
| <i>Selection of core partners:</i> Select 10-20 groups for the Learning Community and Technical Assistance. | End Feb | Selection delayed to March and continued through June; 21 partners selected |
| <i>Press & Blogs:</i> Publish and share 4 articles | Jan-Aug | 18 articles published (see “Communications” below) |
| <i>Presentations at conferences, meetings</i> | Ongoing | Consistent with plan |
| <i>Post resources on dedicated webpage/s</i> | March launch | Consistent with plan |
| <i>Learning community:</i> 5 monthly interactive online meetings with core partners | March - July | Four events staged as of July, with two additional in September and one in December |
| <i>Technical assistance:</i> 1-1 support to core partners | March - July | Consistent with plan |
| <i>June activities:</i> Integrate LGBTQ+ forced migration with Pride and World Refugee Day events. Start to advance partnerships involving resettlement agencies, CBOs (community-based organizations), parishes, etc. | June | Consistent with plan |
| <i>Documentation and research:</i> Document and reflect with partners on Jan-June activities. Share results. Plan for the future. | July report | Report and planning period extended to end of 2023 |
| <i>Review, revision of EMM procedures and materials to ensure full inclusion of LGBTQ+ people.</i> | Ongoing | Continuing effort |



An online survey was conducted between January and early March to begin building a network and to gain insight for refining the project plan. Results were obtained from 185 people residing in 32 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Belgium, Canada, the Dominican Republic, France, and Germany. The survey was released in [English](#) (182 respondents), [Spanish](#) (3 respondents), and [French](#) (0 respondents), and outreach was conducted in all three languages. Results were presented in an [informal report](#).

During the first three months of 2023, the Initiative’s consultant and staff conducted outreach to a wide range of people working in related areas, including Janet Day-Strehlow (who proposed the resolution that sparked the creation of the Initiative); the Rev. Canon Susan Russell (General Convention LGBT+ Caucus); Timothy Hutten (Ethiopian Community Development Council); Lily Kurtz (Rainbow Railroad); and the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, U.S. Department of State.

Network development

The Rainbow Initiative developed a nonbinding “covenant” in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) to be signed by groups that were interested in forming formal partnerships and coined the term “Rainbow Initiative Congregation” (RIC), which was later changed to “Rainbow Initiative Congregation or Community” to reflect the greater diversity of partners than was originally envisioned. Through the beginning of June, when EMM ceased signing agreements for the year, 21 RICs had formally joined the Initiative, including:

- The Episcopal Church: 13 congregations, one monastery, one parachurch organization, and one migrant ministry
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: Three congregations and one synod
- United Church of Christ: One congregation
- EMM refugee resettlement affiliate: One
- 19 RICs located in the United States, one in Germany, and one in France
- 19 RICs were primarily English-speaking, one primarily Spanish-speaking, and one bilingual in English and Spanish

Following is a full list of members:

[All Saints Episcopal Church](#)
Hershey, PA

[Bridge Refugee Services](#)
Knoxville, TN

[Cathedral of the Holy Trinity](#)
Paris, France

[Christ Lutheran Church](#)
Nashville, TN

[Church of the Ascension](#)
Munich, Germany

[Epiphany Episcopal Church](#)
Vacaville, CA

[First Lutheran Church](#)
Duluth, MN

[Gloria Dei Lutheran Church](#)
Duluth, MN

[Grace Episcopal Church](#)
Sandusky, OH

[Holy Spirit Episcopal Church](#)
Belmont, MI

[Iglesia Episcopal San Mateo /
St. Matthew’s Episcopal
Church](#)
Hyattsville, MD

[Integrity Harlem at St. Philip’s
Episcopal Church](#)
New York, NY



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[LGBT Asylum Task Force](#),
Hadwen Park Congregational
Church UCC
Worcester, MA

[Palmer Memorial Episcopal
Church](#)
Houston, TX

[Rio Grande Borderland
Ministries](#)
El Paso, TX

[St. Anna's Episcopal Church](#)
New Orleans, LA

[St. Michael & All Angels
Episcopal Church / San Miguel
y Todos Los Angeles Iglesia
Episcopal](#): Portland, OR

[St. Nicholas Episcopal Church](#)
Elk Grove Village, IL

[St. Paul's](#) and [St. George's](#)
Episcopal Churches
Poughkeepsie and Newburgh,
NY

[Southeastern Synod, The
Evangelical Lutheran Church in
America \(ELCA\)](#)
Atlanta, GA

[The Benedictine Way](#)
Omaha, NE

The Rainbow Initiative also built partnerships with national and international organizations that focus on LGBTQ+ people and/or migration. In particular, EMM became closer to Rainbow Railroad (the Welcome Corps Private Sponsor Organization focused on LGBTQ+ communities) and began to introduce them to decision-makers in the Episcopal Diocese of Washington in the hope that they might form partnerships. The Rainbow Initiative also networked with the National LGBTQ Task Force/Welcoming Church Program Leaders, the United Church of Christ/Open and Affirming Network, Tent, InReach (formerly Asylum Connect), the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, Switchboard, and Refuge America. In addition, the Rainbow Initiative presented its plans and its work to several bodies within The Episcopal Church including Executive Council, the Episcopal Parish Network, the EMM Asylum & Detention Ministry Network, and partners gathered for EMM Programmatic Update Calls.

Informational resources developed

The Rainbow Initiative developed and shared a wide variety of resources during the first half of 2023, principally through the EMM website, online events, email, and social media. Two sections of the website were dedicated to the Initiative: [One for the general public](#), and [another specifically for RICs](#). Over time, the Initiative began to categorize resources into four categories: *Learn, Pray, Witness, and Serve*. Many of these resources are contained in a toolkit that EMM will use extensively with partners in 2024.

Learn: These resources were designed to provide RICs and the wider public with general information about LGBTQ+ forced migrants and migration.

- The Rainbow Initiative: An introduction to LGBTQ+ forced migrants & what The Episcopal Church can do with and for them: [On demand video](#) | [PPT Slides \(English\)](#) | [PPT Slides en español](#)
- An introduction to LGBTQ+ forced migrants & Episcopal Migration Ministries' Rainbow Initiative (training tool updated 2023, August 21): [PDF](#) | [PPT File \(Google Drive\)](#)
- Rainbow Initiative brochure/flier designed to be distributed at Pride and World Refugee Day events: [PDF](#) | [Print-ready PDF with crop marks & bleed](#)
- La Iniciativa Arco Iris folleto en español: [PDF](#) | [PDF que está lista para imprimir con marcas de corte](#)
- Jesus Didn't Turn Anybody Away, Neither Do We: Churches Welcoming LGBTQ Forced Migrants: a webinar presentation for the Center for Migration Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University on October 19, 2023: [On demand video](#)
- The [website](#) also includes links to reports that were not produced through the Initiative.



Pray: The Rainbow Initiative focused special outreach to seminaries (targeted email communication with all Episcopal seminaries, an online meeting, and a survey) hoping that they would be interested in partnering on the development of liturgical resources for use in Pride Month worship services.

In the end, the resources were developed by The Benedictine Way (an RIC) and Rainbow Initiative staff and consultants working with several volunteer advisors.

- [Rainbow Initiative Collects \(Prayers\) for Use in Worship Services](#)
- [Collects – Colectas – en español](#)
- [Rainbow Initiative Prayers of the People for Use in Worship Services](#)
- [Prayers of the People – Oraciones del Pueblo – en español](#)
- [Resources for Pride worship services](#)
- [God, Bless Those Who Are Afraid, prayer by Louie Crew Clay](#)
- [Dios, bendice a los que tienen miedo por Louie Crew Clay](#)

Witness: Among the resources most universally appreciated by RICs were the banners, posters, and stickers that EMM had produced and mailed to partners at no expense to them. They were undoubtedly our most effective tools at bringing visibility to LGBTQ+ forced migration/migrants, and the work of The Episcopal Church, as they were seen by hundreds of thousands of people in Pride and World Refugee Day events, and our partners tell us that they were the subject of many questions and photographs.³

- [Banners, Posters, and Stickers](#)
- EMM [Logos & Graphics](#) for social media
- [Ideas for slogans to be put on signs for Pride marches](#)
- World Refugee Day resources: [Ideas for slogans to put on signs](#)
- [Events calendar](#)
- [Form for registering events](#)

Serve: This inaugural phase of the Rainbow Initiative focused on raising awareness, discernment, and network-building. That being the case, we did not focus on developing tools for providing basic necessities to LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, but we did publicize and share existing tools, including a guide co-authored by the Initiative's consultant.⁴ When they joined the Rainbow Initiative, three partners were providing some form of direct service to LGBTQ+ asylum-seekers.⁵ By September, six additional RICs communicated to us that they were planning or considering developing direct service programs focused, specifically on these communities.⁶ Several others have voiced interest in raising funds to support direct-service programs.

³ See: [EMM Rainbow Initiative partners shine a spotlight on LGBTQ+ forced migrants during Pride Month](#). *Episcopal Migration Ministries Blog*.

⁴ McGuirk, Siobhan, Max Niedzwiecki, Temitope Oke & Anastasia Volkova. (2015). [Stronger Together, a Guide to Supporting LGBT Asylum Seekers](#). LGBT Freedom and Asylum Network.

⁵ The LGBT Asylum Task Force (Worcester, MA) was providing wrap-around support to about 30 LGBTQ+ asylum seekers. Both Ascension Episcopal Church (Munich, Germany) and St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church / San Miguel y Todos Los Angeles Iglesia Episcopal (Portland, OR) were providing direct support to one person, each.

⁶ The following RICs communicated that they are interested in preparing to provide direct assistance to LGBTQ+ forced migrants: St. Anna's Episcopal Church (New Orleans, LA), Integrity Harlem at St. Philip's Episcopal Church (New York, NY), Grace Episcopal Church (Sandusky, OH), Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church (Houston, TX), Holy Spirit Episcopal Church (Belmont, MI), and the Rio Grande Borderland Ministry



Communications

In addition to the launch of the Rainbow Initiative webpages and frequent one-on-one contact by email and teleconference, our communications activities included the publication of articles and blog posts, social media exposure, email newsletters, a webinar, learning community meetings, conferences, materials created for specific partners' use, and regular team meetings.

Press and blog posts: The Rainbow Initiative was featured in at least 18 articles and blog posts between January and October 2023:

- (2023, October 3). [Update on the Rainbow Initiative](#). *Episcopal Migration Ministries Newsletter*.
- (2023, July 6) [EMM Rainbow Initiative partners shine a spotlight on LGBTQ+ forced migrants during Pride Month](#). *Episcopal Migration Ministries Blog*.
- (2023, June 22) [Fearless love](#). *Episcopal Migration Ministries Blog*.
- (2023, June 20). Curry, The Most Rev. Michael. [Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's World Refugee Day sermon](#).
- (2023, June 20). Shipman, Sarah. [A message from EMM Director Sarah Shipman on World Refugee Day](#). *Episcopal Migration Ministries Blog*.
- (2023, June 20). Ulloa Chavez, The Rev. Canon. [Un Lugar para Todos/A Space for All](#). *The Episcopal Diocese of Arizona*.
- (2023, June 16). Korkzan, Shireen. [EMM's Rainbow Initiative to observe World Refugee Day, participate in panel discussion and Pride Mass](#). *Episcopal News Service*.
- (14 June 2023). Curry, The Most Rev. Michael. [Presiding Bishop Michael Curry Offers World Refugee Day sermon](#). *The Episcopal Church, Office of Public Affairs*.
- (2023, June 7) [Rainbow Initiative events](#). *Episcopal Migration Ministries Blog*.
- (2023, June 5) [What is the Rainbow Initiative?](#) *Episcopal Migration Ministries Blog*.
- (2023, June). [Reconciling panel discussion: The Rainbow Initiative and displaced LGBTQ+ persons](#). *The Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee*.
- (2023, May 2) [Episcopal Migration Ministries announces Rainbow Initiative Congregations and Communities](#). *Episcopal Migration Ministries Blog*.
- (2023, February 8) [The Rainbow Initiative](#). *Episcopal Migration Ministries Blog*.
- (2023, May 11). [Honor LGBTQ+ forced migrants in June through Episcopal Migration Ministries' Rainbow Initiative](#). *The Episcopal Church, Office of Public Affairs*.
- (2023, March 27). [Episcopal Migration Ministries shares 'Rainbow Initiative' survey results, seeks participant congregations](#). *The Episcopal Church, Office of Public Affairs*.
- (2023, February 13). Petersen, Kirk. *Collegiality prevails despite COO drama*. *The Living Church*.
- Millard, Egan. (2023, January 30). [Episcopal Migration Ministries launches initiative to help LGBTQ+ migrants, seeks input through survey](#). *Episcopal News Service*.
- (2023, January 30). [Episcopal Migration Ministries launches project, survey focused on LGBTQ+ forced migrants](#). *The Episcopal Church, Office of Public Affairs*.

Social media: The lists below do not include the Rainbow Initiative social media posts that were produced by RICs or others such as news outlets.

(El Paso, TX). In November 2023, EMM's Rainbow Initiative was in the process of helping the following partners to establish direct aid programs: St. Thomas Episcopal Church and other partners working with Rainbow Railroad's Welcome Corps program (Diocese of Washington); St. Anna's Episcopal Church working with Home is Here NOLA (Diocese of Louisiana); and Christ Episcopal Church Cleveland Heights (Diocese of Ohio). In addition, Bridge (Rainbow Initiative member) has embarked upon the resettlement of its first openly transgender client.



In the following list of posts on the *EMM Facebook* page, the number of individuals reached follows the release date.⁷

- January 30: 1,400
- Feb 16: 794
- March 27: 855
- May 8: 741
- June 1: 835
- June 5: 1,100
- June 7: 520
- June 14: 6,100
- June 15 (two posts): 1,300, 377
- June 16: 353
- June 20: 2,700
- June 21: 621
- June 22: 236
- June 23: 169
- June 27: 177
- June 28 (two posts): 525, 397
- July 6: 823
- July 25: 212
- August 24: 401

In the following list of posts on the [EMM Instagram](#) account, the number of individuals reached follows the release date.

- January 31: 292
- Feb 16: 125
- March 27: 248
- May 8: 366
- June 1: 202
- June 5: 236
- June 7: 180
- June 14: 573
- June 15 (two posts): 192, 121
- June 16 (two posts): 264, 175
- June 20: 439
- June 21: 200
- June 22: 206
- June 23: 216
- June 28: 479
- July 6: 250
- July 25: 276
- August 24: 352

Webinar: EMM hosted a webinar, *The Rainbow Initiative: An introduction to LGBTQ+ forced migrants & what The Episcopal Church can do with and for them*, on March 30, 2023, to provide basic information about the Rainbow Initiative and LGBTQ+ forced migrants. The recording and slides were made publicly available on the website.

- EMM Webinar: *The Rainbow Initiative: An introduction to LGBTQ+ forced migrants & what The Episcopal Church can do with and for them*. Webinar resources: [On demand video](#) | [PPT Slides \(English\)](#) | [PPT Slides en español](#)

Learning community: The Rainbow Initiative staged six interactive Zoom calls for the RICs to encourage discussion and networking, and to gather their input for planning.

Conferences and other meetings: Rainbow Initiative staff and consultants shared their work and plans to various groups, including:

- Executive Council: - February 11, 2023; June 13, 2023; October 3, 2023
- Episcopal Parish Network: March 8-11, 2023

⁷ To access these posts, visit <https://www.facebook.com/EMMRefugees> and search “Rainbow”



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- Asylum & Detention Ministry: March 1, 2023; March 22, 2023
- EMM Programmatic Update Call: March 9, 2023; September 21, 2023
- Welcoming Church Program Leaders meeting, National LGBTQ Task Force: March 2, 2023

Communications tools produced for specific partners' use: Staff and consultants produced communications tools for RICs upon their request:

- [Blurbs for newsletters, church bulletins, etc.](#)
- [Text for a brochure or flier in German](#)
- [A slideshow](#) for use at a community forum presented by St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church in Portland, OR.

Email lists: The Rainbow Initiative operates two email distribution lists: One for the wider community of interested individuals (6,333 subscribers), and the other for RIC representatives only (283 subscribers).

Regular team meetings: The Rainbow Initiative team met on a weekly or biweekly basis for most of the period covered by this report.

Activities marking Pride and World Refugee Day

Through Pride and World Refugee Day events, hundreds of thousands of people became aware, at least momentarily, that The Episcopal Church cares about LGBTQ+ forced migrants. [An EMM blog post](#) describes many of the activities that took place during June. Some of our partners' communities celebrated Pride later in the year. Not all of them are reflected here, but they included the following:

- St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church carried the Rainbow Initiative banner in the Portland, OR, Pride March on July 16th. As in other activities they have been leading, SMAA emphasized in Pride the fact that many LGBTQ+ people – and particularly transgender people – have been moving to Portland and other relatively welcoming communities because of the negative experiences they have been subjected to in states that have recently adopted discriminatory legislation.
- Rio Grande Borderland Ministries (El Paso, TX) and St. Anna's Episcopal Church (New Orleans, LA) had posted their Rainbow Initiative banners in front of their facilities, only to have them torn down. They rehung them and continue undaunted in this work.
- Gloria Dei and First Lutheran Churches of Duluth, MN, marched with the Rainbow Initiative banner in their Pride parade during Labor Day weekend.
- The Southeastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America used Rainbow Initiative resources to plan for the future of its work with LGBTQ+ people and migration, in partnership with Episcopal Church bishops whose dioceses overlap with the synod's jurisdiction.
- Christ Lutheran Church of Nashville, TN, worked with Inspiritus (a refugee service organization) to march in Pride under the Rainbow Initiative banner, distribute over 1,000 fliers, and gather contact information for over 500 people who said they were interested in knowing more about LGBTQ+ forced migrants. After a bombing threat was discovered, President Joe Biden unexpectedly arrived to speak at the Pride festivities. Several Inspiritus clients and volunteers (who were forced migrants themselves) were able to share in that experience.



On June 25, 2023, the Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee hosted a Reconciling Panel Discussion on the Rainbow Initiative and LGBTQ+ displaced persons, immediately prior to the ecumenical Knoxville Pride Mass at Church of the Good Samaritan. The panel discussion featured panelists from Episcopal Migration Ministries, the U.S. State Department, Bridge Refugee Services, and others. Rainbow Initiative team members were crucial partners in planning and staging this event, which is described in [this article](#) and [this blog post](#). The following videos are also available:

- [LGBTQ+ Asylum Seekers in the US: Strengths, Challenges, and What it Means to 'Belong'](#). This is an extended version of a video that was first presented at the Reconciling Panel Discussion staged at Church of the Good Samaritan in Knoxville, TN, on June 25, 2023, in connection with Episcopal Migration Ministries' Rainbow Initiative. In it, Craig Mortley presents a brief account of his own experience as a gay asylum seeker, and explores the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ asylum seekers as well as the contributions they make to their new communities. In addition, he introduces his concept of "belonging": What does it mean for an LGBTQ+ asylum seeker to really belong in a church or other community as a fully human being whose identity transcends victimhood and struggle?
- [Reconciling Panel Discussion: The Rainbow Initiative and Displaced LGBTQ+ Persons](#).

Review and revision of EMM materials and procedures

From the beginning, the Rainbow Initiative has included the objective of reviewing and revising EMM's materials and procedures as necessary to ensure that they are fully inclusive of LGBTQ+ people. Staff and consultants drafted a [style-guide](#), to ensure consistency and transparency in this work, and they are in the process of reaching out to colleagues within EMM for their input.

Other activities

Through the LGBT Asylum Task Force, the Rainbow Initiative became involved in discussions with Kasha Nagabesera, a prominent Ugandan human rights activist, about aid that was needed by LGBTQ+ people in Uganda and in Kakuma Refugee Camp. This exchange led to further discussion with Dr. Katrina Roseboro-Marsh, the Executive Director of Open & Affirming (United Church of Christ) and – separately – with a funder known to EMM. In the end, the funder decided to support work directed to helping these populations, but through different organizations. We believe that our action contributed to the provision of this support to vulnerable LGBTQ+ people in Uganda and Kenya.

EMM regularly receives email messages from LGBTQ+ people seeking safety outside of the United States who are asking for help with resettlement. We respond to each message to the best of our ability, voicing our sympathy for their hardships and making whatever suggestions we can about options that might be open to them given their circumstances.

In October, EMM was contacted by parishioners of Christ Episcopal Church in Shaker Heights, Ohio, who became interested in providing housing to an LGBTQ+ asylum seeker after learning about the Rainbow Initiative. We spoke with them one-on-one and coordinated a meeting with several other organizations⁹ that might provide advice or help. They are now in the process of gathering a team of people, congregations, and organizations to provide assistance through EMM's [Neighbor-to-Neighbor](#) program.

Leaders of the Rainbow Initiative team at the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Paris, France, report that the discernment process that was initiated by EMM's invitation to become a RIC continues to



lead in unexpected directions: In November 2023 they instituted a weekly series of “inclusive compline” which will continue to make explicit reference to forced migrants as well as LGBTQ+ people, and they hope that through this worship they will bring new life to service-related ministry. In addition, the [webpage](#) that they created as part of the Rainbow Initiative has inspired the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe to follow their example.

Planning for the future of the Rainbow Initiative

Since the end of June, staff and consultants have been reflecting on what the Initiative accomplished during its first six months, and planning for what should come next. They have gathered input from partners and the wider community through a survey⁸ and two learning community events, as well as reports submitted by RICs.⁹

Summary of lessons learned

Rainbow Initiative personnel and partners have developed the following lessons learned, and are reflecting them in plans for 2024:

- Within The Episcopal Church, there is strong interest in LGBTQ+ forced migration.
- This work requires dedicated funding to galvanize the potential of partners within and beyond The Episcopal Church to provide tangible support to LGBTQ+ forced migrants.
- Given the economic and other institutional vulnerability they typically experience, their newcomer status in the U.S. their social isolation, and the trans/homophobia they encounter, LGBTQ+ forced migrants themselves need extra support to develop their potential as leaders in this work.
- Given the number of people who they attract, Pride marches offer excellent opportunities for community education about LGBTQ+ forced migration and The Episcopal Church.
- Many congregations and organizations are committed to both LGBTQ+ inclusion and to helping forced migrants, but more focus should be dedicated to helping partners to understand the connections between those domains which are often seen as separate, and then to working with those partners to plan and implement direct-service and advocacy activities.
- The Episcopal Church has a unique and significant role to play in terms of framing aid to LGBTQ+ forced migrants as a way of living out our faith: We do this work, each in our own way, because our faith calls us to it. This can serve as a counterpoint to the more common use of religion to condemn and persecute LGBTQ+ people around the world.

⁸ A sharable survey report can be found [here](#).