

## Ambassadors of diversity

Beloved person,

*My grandmother has had dementia for years. Whenever I visit her nursing home with Pascual, it always takes her a moment to recognise me. I look at her, say: "Hi Grandma!" and tell her I am her grandson Lorenzo. Then she gives me a kiss and tells me how happy she is that I am here. I also need to keep reminding her what the man next to me is called. Grandma's dementia started before I met Pascual, so I don't think she really recognises him the way she recognises me. But he also always gets a smile and a kiss as well. She never says she is okay with me being attracted to men or that she accepts our relationship. She simply treats us for who we are: her grandson and his partner, who are visiting.*

This summer, Pride will be celebrated in various cities in the Netherlands and beyond. It is a vibrant celebration that emphasises equality and acceptance, especially for the LGBTQIA+<sup>1</sup> community. It also serves as a visible protest and a reminder that equality is far from achieved everywhere, even in the Netherlands. What do equality and acceptance actually mean?

Broos Lammes and his father Ronald Giphart have written a book titled *'It Doesn't Matter to Us at All'*. That was Ronald's reaction when his son told him he was attracted to men. At first glance, this seems like a very open-minded approach, but it overlooks Broos' years of struggle that preceded it. Don't we often respond with the message that we don't care at all? Or that everyone should just figure it out for themselves, sometimes even with the unspoken addition 'As long as it doesn't bother me'?

Truly accepting others also means immersing yourself in their struggle for self-acceptance. Growing up in a society where heterosexuality and cisgender<sup>2</sup> are the norm can be very oppressive for young people who feel different from this norm, or who don't know yet how they feel.

In the current climate of polarisation and conservatism, the freedom to become and be yourself is under pressure. There are numerous examples, both domestically and internationally, of intolerance towards the LGBTQIA+ community and of perceived insecurity: in the US, transgender rights are being restricted and DEI programs<sup>3</sup> are being abolished. And in the Netherlands, several *gaybra crossings* (rainbow-colored pedestrian crossings) have been defaced or vandalised in recent years. Intolerance is also on the rise in other areas, and inclusive thinking is under pressure: influential YouTubers who view women as inferior<sup>4</sup>, rising antisemitism<sup>5</sup>, refugees who no longer feel welcome in the Netherlands and are blamed for everything<sup>6</sup>. You are also probably familiar with examples from your own lives. Are we allowing this to happen? And where will this growing trend toward intolerance end?

As Apostolics we have a responsibility in this regard. We believe that all life flows from one source and that living in connection is the key to a meaningful and purposeful life. This also means accepting others as they are and loving him, her or them unconditionally. This does not come naturally and requires practice in observing carefully. Can we look for what connects us and transcends us, like Lorenzo's grandmother?

Let us keep questioning and challenging ourselves, and keep the conversation going. About who we are, and who we want to be. About how we see others, and ourselves. About what we take for granted. About our own blind spots. Because how self-evident is it, really, that we are inclusive? And if it truly is self-evident, do we dare to stand up when it is up for discussion?

We need ambassadors. People who make their voices heard, especially for those who are often not heard themselves. Because diversity is not a threat. It is a strength. A community that embraces difference is a community that lives, breathes, and grows. So let us be a community where everyone feels seen and safe. A community of ambassadors – of diversity, of love, of justice.

With a warm-hearted greeting,

Pascual van Arragon

Ulbe de Boer

Andrew Hoffmans

Lorenzo Oechies

Zoë van der Schaar-Zopfi



<sup>1</sup> LGBTQIA+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual/aromantic/agender. The plus at the end stands for all gender identities and sexual orientations which do not fall under these letters.

<sup>2</sup> Cisgender is the reverse of transgender. When the birth gender matches with how they feel themselves, that is called cisgender.

<sup>3</sup> DEI stands for diversity, equality and inclusivity.

<sup>4</sup> [www.psychologie.nl/artikel/andrew-tate-in-de-klas-leraren-zien-groeiend-seksisme-bij-jongeren](http://www.psychologie.nl/artikel/andrew-tate-in-de-klas-leraren-zien-groeiend-seksisme-bij-jongeren)

<sup>5</sup> [www.nos.nl/artikel/2528434-joden-in-europa-ervaren-meer-antisemitisme-nederland-scoort-slechter-dan-gemiddeld](http://www.nos.nl/artikel/2528434-joden-in-europa-ervaren-meer-antisemitisme-nederland-scoort-slechter-dan-gemiddeld)

<sup>6</sup> [www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/nl/artikelen/nieuws/zes-zorgen-over-de-ingrijpende-asielwetten](http://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/nl/artikelen/nieuws/zes-zorgen-over-de-ingrijpende-asielwetten)