

**A CONVERSATION WITH AND ABOUT
TRANSGENDER PERSONS**

**April 7, 2025
6pm-8pm**

**Historic Saint Paul Catholic Church
425 W Short St, Lexington KY 40507**

Brother Christian Matson, the Diocese of Lexington's vowed hermit, and transgender man, will facilitate the evening's conversation.

Offered by St. Paul's Pastoral Associate, JR Zerkowski, in partnership with Fortunate Families, and LGBTQ+ Ministries

This respectful encounter is appropriate for the entire family!

THIS WILL BE A SAFE PLACE WITH SECURITY PRESENT

A flyer advertises a parish event in Lexington, Kentucky, that was to feature a talk by Br. Christian Matson, a diocesan hermit who is transgender. Comments on social media prompted organizers to postpone the event. (Courtesy of Stan "JR" Zerkowski)



by Brian Fraga

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March 21, 2025

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A swarm of angry, vitriolic comments on social media prompted organizers in Lexington, Kentucky, to postpone a parish event that was to feature a talk by Br. Christian Matson, a diocesan hermit who is transgender.

The comments, which were posted in a Facebook group and on the parish Facebook page of [Historic St. Paul Catholic Church](#) in Lexington, led Stan "JR" Zerkowski to conclude that the event, originally scheduled for March 10 in a building on the parish campus, would not be safe for those attending.

"Some of them were so frightening in their vitriol that it made me very concerned about the safety of both Brother Christian and also of those trans persons who would be coming to this event," said Zerkowski, the director of the parish's LGBTQ ministry.

Zerkowski told National Catholic Reporter that the event, which was to feature Matson talking about his life and answering questions about transgender issues, has been rescheduled for April 7 in the main church building. He said law enforcement officials will be present to provide security.

"The trolls are not going to shut us up," Zerkowski said. "They're not going to shut down our ministry and they're not going to intimidate us."

The episode in Lexington is the latest flashpoint where transgender identity is clashing with the Catholic Church's traditional teachings on sexuality and gender. While Pope Francis [has met with transgender people](#) and sought to create a welcoming space for them in the church, the Vatican has referred to "gender theory" and gender-affirming surgeries as "[grave violations of human dignity](#)."

[Related: Is the Vatican's condemnation of trans surgery new? Theologians discuss.](#)

The comments that alarmed Zerkowski were shared in response to a flyer advertising the event that he had posted in a Facebook group and on the parish Facebook page. Zerkowski said several commenters personally attacked Matson, [who publicly announced his transgender identity in 2024](#).

"Some of the comments were just beyond the pale," said Zerkowski, who added that one of the people commenting on Facebook had a cover photo on their personal

page depicting a religious sister in full habit armed with a shotgun.

"As I looked through the profiles of the people who commented, I felt that this was just an unsafe situation," Zerkowski said.

Matson told NCR that he saw some of the comments and that they did not surprise him.

"People have been emboldened to say nasty things to trans folks," Matson said, adding that he lost longtime friends after he came forward publicly as transgender on Pentecost 2024.

"I think that's partly to do with our conversation about the topic in the church, where we're really not talking with trans folks but talking about trans folks, part of which this talk was supposed to correct," he said.



Br. Christian Matson hikes with his dog, Brother Odilo ("Odie"), in West Virginia. (Courtesy of Christian Matson)

At the rescheduled event on April 7, Matson said he will talk about his life experiences for about an hour, as well as his theological position, which he will detail in an upcoming book, which emphasizes that being a trans person is compatible with Catholic anthropology. Matson said he will also share his thoughts on how the church can better support trans Catholics before answering questions from people in the audience.

"I encourage people to ask questions," he said. "I'm happy to answer any questions publicly."

Fr. Richard Watson, pastor of Historic St. Paul Catholic Church, who also saw the social media comments, told NCR that several of his parishioners voiced their displeasure that Matson's talk on March 10 had been cancelled.

"They didn't want hate to win," said Watson, who added that he tailored [his Mass homily for the weekend of March 15-16](#) to "throw down the gauntlet" against hate.

'God loves everyone. Full stop.'

—Br. Christian Matson

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"It was something that I had to do," said Watson, who preached on how hate is not a Christian virtue, and that Catholics have a choice to make between "standing on the side of love" or embracing hateful attitudes.

"I cannot sit by quietly and let people believe that haters in the Catholic Church have the final say," Watson said.

Matson said he heard "nothing but the Gospel" in Watson's homily.

"God loves everyone. Full stop," Matson said.

Advertisement

Zerkowski said Watson's homily led to "thunderous applause" from St. Paul parishioners.

"That our parishioners were solidly behind us in standing with and unconditionally loving and supporting our trans community, that really spoke to me," said Zerkowski, who hopes that the rescheduled event will fill the church, which has a capacity of about 800 people.

"I don't care about the trolls," Zerkowski said. "I know we are going to have a tremendously safe environment."