

## **Xorje Olivares Extended Interview**

OwningOurFaith

### **Background**

My name is Xorje Olivares, I'm 26 years old and I'm originally from Eagle Pass, Texas. I don't know someone else who loves their parents as much as I do which is a weird thing to say because Mexican American culture as a whole is all about the family, but if I don't talk to my parents at least three or four times a week I feel weird. Not to say that everything I do in my life is dependent on everything that they tell me to do but, their influence is undeniable. I have one sister, she's 29, and the relationship I have with her, she's like my best friend, and just what I have with them, I know that I lucked out.

The relationship that I have with my parents I think is also dependant on a relationship with the church because we are essentially what, I guess, we're called to be, which is our own representation of the holy family because we are always at church, we always do what we can. My mother's been involved in the altar society forever, my dad helps decorate during Christmas and Palm Sunday, my sister reads and then I was an altar boy for ten years. So there's never been a time when I don't remember going to church, I don't remember helping out. Every Christmas my parents would always buy something for the nuns, would always buy something for the priests, just because they literally are the extension of the family that we have.

### **Faith Journey**

I think I was seven when I started being an altar boy and I don't know why I just thought it was the coolest thing ever to want to help out the priest. And so I would do it every Saturday mass for the Sunday vigil mass and I thought it was fun. And so I did that literally all of elementary school, middle school, then in high school we finally had some missionaries come in. This young couple and they decided to finally create the first youth group that our church had ever had. And so became a part of the youth group, invited some friends from high school to be a part of it, and there were also very much like my other family members where they're culturally Catholic but not necessarily always go to mass, so that I felt good being able to bring them into that for a change. So that was fun and it was with them that we started the process of fundraising so we could go to World Youth Day.

I went to college, University of Texas of Austin and they have a huge Catholic center there. Every Sunday would wake up, leave my dorm room and go to church. But because nobody was ever as regimented about it. Like, they wouldn't go on a regular basis I would always go by myself, so I would say since 2006 I've gone to church by myself every week. And it's never been an issue for me. Granted it's fun when a friend would tag along or a partner would tag along, but I never needed somebody to tag along because I was my parents instilled this thing in me that I knew that I'd be fine either way because I wasn't going to socialize I was going to be with God, in that sense.

## **Coming Out Story**

So there's this inside joke with my family that I have, there's this video, I want to say I'm three years old, and it's like a Christmas video. And my sister got this doll for Christmas and all I ever wanted to do was play with her doll. And so when my sister and I go back and think like hey, when did we find out you were gay, like we always joke and we say that, but I think everybody knows there's something different about them, at least, I did. The first time I actually thought, like, put a name to it was maybe late elementary school. And then the first people I actually told, I was in eighth grade and I remember being at my friend's house and...not really knowing the right way to do it, but just blurting like " I think I'm gay," and them automatically saying, oh you're fine, we accept you, don't worry about it, and then from eighth grade on, at least until senior year, it was like, the trickling down of the number of people who knew. So if I was extremely comfortable with you or if you were one of my really good friends then I would tell you, otherwise I couldn't be bothered to let other people know because it wasn't their business. I don't think my desire to keep my sexuality to myself was because of my faith. I think there were other factors that come into play. Mainly identity and culture. There are very few people, if any, that are out in my hometown. There are very few people, if any now, that if you think about Latinos who are out, and beside from like Ricky Martin, the numbers are kind of few. And I think a lot of it has to do with, I think there is some influence of religion, but also just the idea, this, machismo where you're just supposed to be this manly person and you don't deviate from that.

The first person in my immediate family I told was my sister and a lot of it has to do just because of the fact my sister and I have a very close relationship because it's just the two of us. And so we were driving home from college one year, it was 2007, and I told her, because it was National Coming Out day I was like, you know what, if I'm going to say something I need to just say it, because I never, I didn't want to be that person who hid so much from his family considering how close I was with my family and so it was eating me alive, knowing that they didn't know about this part of me. Granted, I feel like everybody, most gay people I know say that they always believe that their parents know or at least their mother knows, and so I knew my mother knew but I just couldn't say it, so I figured the best thing to do would be to tell my sister first. So I told my sister and she said, oh you know I always suspected but I'm glad you told me because now I feel like we can be that much closer.

I didn't tell my parents until I moved to New York - that was fall 2010. And I think the reason I told them after I moved was whether or not it was actually going to happen, if they disowned me, I would have already been on my own. I would have already been here in New York and felt like I didn't have to deal. So I told them over Skype, which was not the best thing because I wish I had the guts to tell them in person and I wish I'd told them earlier, but I told them and immediately we changed the subject, talked for like another hour, and that was it. And so, you know, Skype and then my sister calls me about five minutes later she says, you know I asked mom and dad if they wanted to talk afterwards, they said no, and went into the room, so, a part of me was a little hurt, but at the same time, looking back, I shouldn't have expected them to have been a hundred percent right away, just because the amount of time it took me to even be fully okay with

who I was, I could expect them to just do the exact same thing. But almost immediately my mother was all about it, like she made sure she told me she loved me and that nothing was going to change. My dad, it took him awhile. And I was upset at first, but then, at the end of the day my sister was the one who helped me to realize that I just couldn't blame him for it. And I don't know how much of that was because of the Mexican American stuff, how much of that was the Catholic stuff, I just felt like I couldn't question it too much because then it would eat me alive. Eventually we got into a good little rhythm and to this day we have, like I'd, I can't imagine my life not having the support of family that I do. And I recognize that there are people who don't. And it does pain me to realize that it could've, it could've been differently but thankfully it's not.

The one person who doesn't know is my grandmother. She's the only grandparent I have alive still. She's like hardcore Mexican American and the reason we don't tell her is because we just don't want to have to deal with how that's going to affect the nature of the family. But, at this point I kind of don't care who knows. Some of the main reasons we haven't told my grandmother is because, of, she is the matriarch of everything, like she pretty much if you look at her and what she's done in her life, like she is the embodiment of, Catholic woman, Mexican American, super into both, and maybe a lot of us not telling my grandma that I'm gay is because we just...it's hard for change it's hard for anybody to deal with change but for an eighty-three year old woman to deal with change, we just don't want to have to put her in that position, just because life has already been swell as it is, like, what's the point of. I mean I want to tell my grandmother that I'm gay, I really do, I wish it would be, it would open up so many different things for our family that we could have a conversation that we don't normally have, but, I think at this point, she, what I need from her, what I need from my grandmother is there, it's the unconditional love and why jeopardize that at this time?

One thing and it's the word that I've come to adopt when I talk about this is, is the idea of grief and how, myself included, there's this grieving process that comes with accepting the fact that you're gay, and that's not to put a bad connotation to it, it's just the idea that specifically for my parents, my dad said this to me, he said, you know when you told me you were gay I had to grieve the entire life that I planned for you because I'm grieving the life...it's like losing a child, because I thought you were the son who, was, and I don't want to sound melodramatic about it because my dad wasn't when he said this, but, you know, I thought you were going to have the kids, I thought you were going to have the wife, I thought I was going to have to plan the wedding, and, you know have all the birthday parties and do this, and do that and I've spent, when I came out to my parents I was 22, so he said, you know, I've had these 22 years to plan all this out, and not that I blame you for turning it on it's head but you have to realize that there's that process that I have to deal with. And it's a process that I had to deal with I mean, up until I told myself, look, you're gay, get over it, I thought I was going to have the wife, I thought I was going to have the kids, I thought I was going to have, you know, the picket fence, the 2.3 kids, perfect life, going to church, you know walking up with the offerings like my parents did, but that isn't happening, and I'm completely fine with it not happening, it took awhile for me to get to that place but it doesn't negate the fact that the grieving process had to happen and I think everybody, like with a regular death, and that's a weird way to

describe that, you can never tell one person how to grieve and how long to grieve for. So luckily for me, my grieving process wasn't that long, and luckily for my parents the grieving process wasn't that long. But, for other people I recognize that it's longer.

### **Reconciling Faith and Sexuality**

When I was young and trying to figure out what being gay was. I don't think I prayed for God to take it away. I think I just prayed that God help me understand it more. It's what God wanted me to be. I've always felt that way I've always felt that if God had wanted me to be straight then I would have been straight. If God wanted me to be gay then He chose for me to be gay so that's how, that's how I am. I think my parents have accepted that. And I think my parents acknowledge that. My parents have never said, you know, go to church and pray five Hail Mary's and wish that you were straight. That's never been the case.

On a retreat one of the priests, the main priest who was there, pretty much looked out into the crowd, I mean there was about a dozen of us and said, if you're gay, it's ok, don't worry about it. And it was definitely what I needed at that time.

Even to this day I never felt like I don't belong in the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has always made me feel one in the same with everybody else and I think that goes back to where I don't see myself as a gay person when I go to church. I just see myself among other brothers and sisters who want to take part in their faith.

For the first boyfriend I ever had, one of the questions I asked him early on, I asked him three questions and one of them was, are you Catholic? Because I, I needed to know that he would at least understand me on that level and would hopefully go to church with me and hopefully pray with my and do all the stuff that comes with, with being Catholic, so even to this day I feel like the partner that I want to end up with will hopefully be someone who is either Catholic or accepts the fact that I'm Catholic and doesn't necessarily judge me for it or question it, and hopefully, God-willing if I have children, their life is going to be what my life was like, which is start with the baptism, always go to church on Sunday, and never be afraid to accept that spiritual aspect of life.

I'm not necessarily frustrated with the Catholic Church in terms of what they're saying with regards to LGBT people or just gay marriage as a whole because I think we as LGBT people need to understand that this is a, like, several thousand year-old institution and change is coming and we've seen change coming with Pope Francis making all these pro-gay statements and specifically about who's he to judge gay priests and gay people and that gay people have things to offer and they have gifts to offer the church. So I think that in itself is huge process, at the same time when you have certain religious leaders saying things specifically with regards to same-sex marriage, that can get frustrating I mean everybody get frustrated with things like that. But when you think about where we've come, as a body, I don't think that I can be upset and at the same time I think it's just, we should ask other LGBT Catholics to understand that it's just an education process. Once we tell the church that we're here, then maybe conversation will be

different. But it's the same thing, like it's a two-way street in terms of acceptance and understanding that this really is one big family.

When you have LGBT groups at churches, that's just presence alone is an education tool and I think once you have more LGBT Catholics willing to stand up and identify themselves then you will have the church realize, ok, this is somebody we've been, not necessarily neglecting but, you may feel like you've been left on the sidelines but you're not, you're no longer, and so we see you, we accept you and we take you as part of the family. But I think once you stand up and say "I am a gay Catholic," then the church can say, "ok, we see you and we love you."

My sexuality and my religion are very personal things. It's an individual basis in terms of whether or not you feel comfortable being out as an LGBT Catholic. That being said, the riches that come with being fully whole and fully out and being true about your identity I think you only stand to gain because once that process starts and once the church recognizes who you are and can love you for who you are then it can only get better, I hope. But at the same time, if you don't feel like you can where you are, just realize that there are other people who look like you, who sound like you, who...who pray like you. But, there will be a time when you can hopefully feel comfortable being the LGBT Catholic that you are.