BONDINGS

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India's Cardinal Oswald Gracias to LGBT people: "Church embraces you, wants you, needs you"

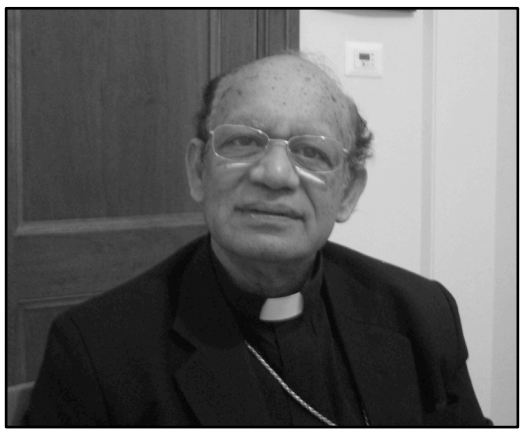
By Francis DeBernardo
Bondings 2.0
NewWaysMinistryBlog.wordpress.com
October 19, 2015

Cardinal Oswald Gracias is Archbishop of Bombay, the head of India's National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and a member of Pope Francis' Council of nine cardinal advisors from around the globe. In the last few years, he has emerged as one of the leading international advocates for better pastoral and civil care of LGBT people. He was the only religious leader in India who opposed an initiative to recriminalize LGBT people, has urged his priests to be more sensitive in their language about LGBT people, spoke out for better pastoral care during last year's extraordinary synod, and met with the Chair of Quest, the United Kingdom's Catholic LGBT group.

He is here in Rome for the synod, and I had the pleasure of sitting down with him, one-on-one, for a brief interview on Sunday night to talk about the pastoral outreach to LGBT people, criminalization laws, church doctrine and language, and his own personal journey.

DeBernardo: In the last couple of years, you've made some very positive gestures in regard to LGBT people. In what ways has your understanding of LGBT people evolved over the years and how did that happen?

Gracias: Initially it began with involvement in civil law with banning homosexuality. I felt that was not right–indiscriminately putting everybody in same category. Therefore, I spoke, saying the Church was not in favor of this. This was a bit of a surprise to many people because of what they think the Church teaches. You must make a distinction with an individual, who is absolutely part of the Church, who we must care for, and who might have a [homosexual] orientation. You can't put them in chains, or say we have no responsibility whatsoever. The law was struck down, but now it's back again.


Cardinal Oswald Gracias

Subsequently, I met a few people also. I realized their goodness, that many people do not realize. They are often painted one way and the images are bad. My own view is that the Church has to be all-embracing, inclusive. and take care of everybody. Our moral principles are clear. I would be too worried that we are breaking our moral code or that the Church's principles are shattered because we say that we are pastoral. The Catechism has said also that they must be cared for. Some people say you are going too far.

DeBernardo: In one way, it's very Catholic position to welcome. To not be welcoming is wrong.

Gracias: To not be welcoming would not be a Catholic attitude. It would not be Christ's attitude, certainly. We have to be very compassionate, understanding, and open to people.

DeBernardo: When I read about your stand on the civil law, I read that you were the only religious leader in India to oppose re-criminalization. How did you find the courage to be the only one?

Gracias: I was convinced. I think gradually others will come to see what I am saying. It's so clear in my mind. This is what the Church would want. I'm convinced that eventually it will be de-criminalized. It's a question of time.

DeBernardo: Did you receive a backlash or criticism for your stand?

Gracias: Not much. There were a few. There were some theologians who said they disagreed with me. But that was an intellectual discussion, and I was happy about that because it allowed me to sharpen my thoughts on the matter. But there was no campaign against what I said.

DeBernardo: In the U.S. we have many parishes who have set up ministries of welcome to LGBT ple. What advice would you give to those parishes and pastors working with LGBT people?

Gracias: I honestly would think that they would know more than me. From experience, you always learn how to do things pastorally. Homosexuality is not fully out of the closet in India. The atmosphere is not so open in the civil society to be able to have people openly come and declare themselves. As a matter of fact a gay association asked me if I would say Mass for them. I said, "Absolutely. No difficulty whatsoever. I said to them they should keep in mind that they would suddenly be coming out into the open. For me, it's not a problem.

DeBernardo: Do you see any gifts that lesbian and gay people bring to the Church?

Gracias: I haven't met enough to make a generalization. But the people I have met have impressed me very

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The pope could be best friends with trans people after all

By Jane Fae
Gay Star News
July 16, 2015

The Pope does not have it in for trans folk. He is absolutely not running some sort of veiled anti-trans agenda.

In fact – with a little more support in the right quarters – Pope Francis may well turn out to be the best thing that has happened to the trans community, religiously speaking, in a very long while.

That may come as a bit of a shock to those who have been nodding along to the recent spate of alarmist 'insights' in the LGBTI press, and beyond, about how the Pope has depicted 'transgenderism' as on a par with nuclear weapons in its dangerousness.

The problem is these insights are based on little other than second hand interpretation of remarks delivered in a very different context. In most cases this view is not supported in any official way within the Catholic church.

Someone who ought to know is Monsignor Keith Barltrop. He was recently tasked by the head of the Catholic Church in England, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, for expanding the church's LGBTI ministry.

Gay Star News asked Barltrop what he understood the Pope's official position on transgender issues to be.

He told us: 'I would be surprised if it is an issue he has given any great thought to. At an individual level, transgender issues affect a very small minority of individuals within the church.

'As far as I am aware, the Church takes no official position on trasnsgenderism: it is a pastoral issue, not a matter of doctrine.

'Insofar as the Church were to be involved in any individual's decision to transition, it would counsel caution, because this is not a step to take lightly: but it should be fully supportive of individuals who have made that decision.'

So why have so many in the LGBTI community bought into the idea this Pope, otherwise one of the most inclusive of modern times, has a bee in his bonnet about transgender people?

That notion seems to be based almost exclusively on a very particular interpretation of a phrase used on a number of occasions over the past few months by Pope Francis: 'gender theory' ('la teoria di genere'). He compares 'gender theory' to the nuclear arms race. And he condemns it, in his recent ground-breaking encyclical on climate

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'Patron saint' of LGBT Catholics, John McNeill, 90, dies

By Thomas C. Fox
National Catholic Reporter
September 24, 2015

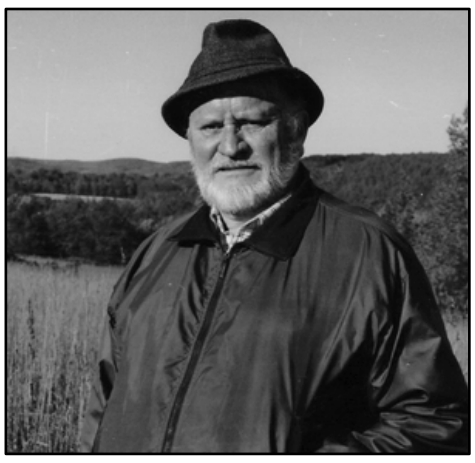
The patron to gay and lesbian Catholics who struggle to find a welcoming home in their church, John J. McNeill, died Sept. 22 in a hospice facility in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. He was 90.

McNeill is widely revered among gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights Catholics as well as others who looked to his scholarly writings to help them accept their own sexuality and defend themselves against what they view to be misguided church teachings.

Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry, today said McNeill possessed "a rare mixture of both a great heart and a great mind," adding that gays and lesbians have been "informed not only by his philosophical principles and logic, but by his awareness of deep and real human needs."

"It is not an overstatement to say that any of the pastoral, political, theological, and practical advances that LGBT Catholics have made in recent years could only have been brought about because of John's groundbreaking work."

Sister of Loretto Jeannine Gramick,


John McNeill

co-founder of New Ways Ministry, called McNeill "a true pioneer in whose footsteps so many of us followed."

"I learned so much from his research and writing, but I learned even more from personal interactions with him by witnessing the passion and human concern he had for every LGBT person he encountered."

DignityUSA Executive Director Marianne Duddy-Burke spoke of McNeill as a prophet. "John was really the first major prophet of the Catholic LGB movement. Every DignityUSA president has consulted him for insights into the emerging issues of the

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Bondings is a seasonal publication designed to keep our subscribers informed of issues that pertain to lesbian and gay people in the Catholic Church.

Founded in 1977, New Ways Ministry is an educational and bridge-building ministry of reconciliation between the Catholic gay and lesbian community and the institutional structures of the Roman Catholic Church.

New Ways Ministry seeks to eradicate prevalent myths and stereotypes about homosexuality and supports civil rights for lesbian and gay persons in society.

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New Ways Ministry Congratulates St. Mary's Academy on Adoption of Employment Non-Discrimination Policy

Bondings 2.0
NewWaysMinistryBlog.wordpress.com
August 27, 2015

New Ways Ministry thanks and congratulates St. Mary's Academy, Portland, Oregon, for not only reversing their decision to dismiss a counselor who they learned was a lesbian, but to adopt a non-discrimination policy which welcomes gay and lesbian employees, including those who are legally married.

St. Mary's policy sets a precedent for Catholic institutions across the nation and around the globe who are faced with the new reality of gay and lesbian people who are more open about their sexual orientations, and the even newer reality of the legalization of marriage for gay and lesbian people. To the Catholic Church's shame, since 2008, over 50 employees have lost their jobs at Catholic institutions because of LGBT issues—most of them involving marriage. These 50 are only the cases which have become public.

Since 2013, New Ways Ministry has been advocating for Catholic institutions to adopt non-discrimination policies protecting people from being fired because of sexual orientation, marital or relational status, and support for marriage equality. Such policies are easily supported by the authentic Catholic teachings on social justice and conscience. Though a number of institutions have had discussions in regard to such policies, St. Mary's Academy is the first known Catholic employer to adopt one.

Equally impressive for St. Mary's Academy is the speed with which the school reversed its decision. One day after the dismissal became public, the school's board met and voted to continue hiring the counselor and to adopt the non-discrimination policy. This speed saved the school community of parents, students, teachers, alumni much grief, as witnessed by the countless strong and pain-filled protests that other institutions have faced because of similar employment disputes.

The St. Mary's case had been particularly egregious because in addition to withdrawing its contract, the school had asked Lauren Brown, the employee, to remain silent about their decision. Brown said that as a matter of integrity she could not be silent, and so she made her story and pertinent documents available to the press. Her example shows that openness and transparency are ways of achieving justice. The burgeoning protest by students, alumni, and parents surely also played a role.

New Ways Ministry prays that other Catholic workplaces will follow the example of St. Mary's Academy in adopting non-discrimination policies. In doing so, they will be living up to the best ideals of the Catholic faith's promotion of human dignity and equality. +

LGBT Catholic Groups Meet in Rome

By Michael K. Lavers
The Washington Blade
October 15, 2015

More than a dozen organizations that advocate on behalf of LGBT Catholics met in Rome over the past weekend.

The Maryland-based New Ways Ministry, DignityUSA and 11 other groups that are part of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics took part in the coalition's inaugural meeting from Oct. 1-4. The European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups, the Christian Association of Gays and Lesbians of Catalonia in Spain, LGBT Catholics Westminster Pastoral Council in the U.K., the Dette Resources Foundation in Zambia and Pastoral de la Diversidad Sexual in Chile are among the other organizations that attended the gathering.

New Ways Ministry Executive Director Frank DeBernardo told the *Washington Blade* on Monday during a telephone interview from Rome the meeting caps off efforts to launch the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics that began two years ago. He said these groups "felt it was time for an international organization since there are so many of us."

Sister Jeannine Gramick, co-founder of New Ways Ministry, and former Irish President Mary McAleese, who has a gay son, are among those who spoke at a conference in Rome on Oct. 3 that focused on "pastoral care" for LGBT Catholics and their families.

"A pastoral approach is better than an ideological one for promoting peaceful and fruitful relationships with LGBT people in the everyday life of Roman Catholic communities," reads a description of the conference. "Beginning from the common humanity LGBT people share with all people and leaving ideology aside for a

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New Ways Ministry Welcomes Pope Francis

New Ways Ministry's Francis DeBernardo, Executive Director, and Sister Jeannine Gramick, Co-Founder, were two of the many leaders of Catholic and LGBT organizations who attended the welcome ceremony at the White House for Pope Francis' arrival in the U.S. The ceremony, which took place on the South Lawn, was held on the morning of September 23, 2015. Also in attendance were representatives from DignityUSA, Fortunate Families, GLAAD, Human Rights Campaign, and Owning Our Faith.

Before Pope Francis Met Kim Davis, He Met with Gay Ex-Student

By Jim Yardley and Laurie Goodstein
The New York Times
October 3, 2015

Ever since it became public that Pope Francis met in Washington with Kim Davis, the Kentucky county clerk who refused to issue marriage licenses for same-sex couples, the questions have been swirling: Why did he meet with her, and was it meant as a political statement?

As it turns out, the Vatican said on Friday, the pope did not mean to endorse Ms. Davis's views. It also said he gave her no more than a typical brief greeting, despite what her lawyer described.

Instead, the Vatican said that Francis gave only one "real audience": to someone later identified as one of his former students, Yayo Grassi, a gay man in Washington who says he brought his partner of 19 years to the Vatican's embassy in Washington for a reunion. They even shot video.

The disclosure, after the Vatican's unusual attempt to correct the impressions left by Francis' meeting with Ms. Davis, added to days of speculation about whether Francis intended to send a message on the place of gays in the church, or conscientious objection, and whether his advisers had fully briefed him on Ms. Davis, or had their own agenda.

The Vatican spokesman emphasized that the meeting with Ms. Davis was arranged by the office of the Vatican's ambassador in Washington, not by anyone in Rome — including the pope.

Pope Francis with former student Yayo Grassi

"The pope did not enter into the details of the situation of Mrs. Davis, and his meeting with her should not be considered a form of support of her position in all of its particular and complex aspects," the Rev. Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, said in a statement released Friday morning.

On the other hand, Mr. Grassi, a 67-year-old caterer, told *The New York Times* that he and the pontiff have known each other since the 1960s, when Jorge Mario Bergoglio, as the future pope was then called, taught him literature and psychology at the Colegio de la Inmaculada Concepción, a Jesuit high school in Santa Fe, Argentina.

Mr. Grassi said that he had resumed contact with the future pope years later, when he was the archbishop of Buenos Aires. He also visited the pope at the Vatican in September 2013, and later contacted his office to ask for an audience in Washington.

"Once I saw how busy and exhausting his schedule was in D.C., I wrote back to him saying perhaps it would be better to meet some other time," Mr. Grassi said. "Then he called me on the phone and he told me that he would love to give me a hug in Washington."

Mr. Grassi said that he had been accompanied by his partner of 19 years, Iwan Bagus, as well as four friends, and that the meeting took place at the Vatican Embassy on Sept. 23 — a day before Ms. Davis met the pope.

Mr. Grassi said that Francis had told him to arrange the visit through the office of Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, the papal nuncio, or envoy, in

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Rome meeting on LGBT issues draws global audience

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while can yield important discoveries for both the LGBT people and the church."

The gatherings coincided the beginning of a three-week meeting of Catholic bishops in Rome during which they will vote on a document that specifically addresses the family. Leaked drafts of the document indicate it will reiterate the church's opposition to unions between gays and lesbians.

Krzysztof Charamsa, a Polish monsignor who had worked in the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith since 2003, came out as gay on the eve of the meeting and revealed he has a boyfriend.

The Holy See on Oct. 3 removed Charamsa from his post. The *Associated Press* reported the Polish monsignor is no longer able to work at the Vatican or pontifical universities in Rome where he had taught theology.

"Notwithstanding the respect due to the events and personal situations, and reflections on the issue, the decision to make such a pointed statement on the eve of the opening of the synod appears very serious and irresponsible," said Rev. Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesperson, in a statement. "It aims to subject the Synod assembly to undue media pressure."

Charamsa's decision to come out coincided with the revelation that Pope Francis met privately with Yayo Grassi, an Argentine man he taught in the 1960s, and his partner at the Apostolic Nunciature in Northwest D.C. on Sept. 23. The Vatican continues to downplay the meeting between the pontiff and Kim Davis, a Kentucky county clerk who refuses to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples because of her religious beliefs, that took place in Washington the following day. +

Catholics honor pioneering work of John McNeill

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Catholic LGBT community."

Born and raised in Buffalo, N.Y., McNeill entered the U.S. Army in 1942 and became a prisoner of war in Nazi Germany — an experience that for him was profoundly spiritual and led him to his entering the Jesuits in 1948. Ordained in 1959, he taught philosophy and theology at Fordham University, Union Theological Seminary, and Le Moyne College, where he was a noted peace advocate during the Vietnam War.

McNeill became a practicing psychotherapist, writing once that he wanted to spread the good news among lesbian and gay Catholics.

In 1976, after a three-year delay, he published with Vatican consent his seminal work, *The Church and the Homosexual* (now in its fourth edition). The book was the first attempt by a reputed scholar and theologian to examine and challenge traditional church teachings on sexuality and attitudes toward gay and lesbian Catholics.

Two years after publication, the Vatican rescinded its approval. A year later, he was ordered by the new head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, and later Pope Benedict XVI, to enter a public silence. It was a silence he observed for nine years while continuing his private ministry to gays and lesbian Catholics. His work included psychotherapy, workshops, lectures and retreats.

"I had agreed to observe this silence in the hopes that over time the church would consider the evidence and begin a reevaluation, he wrote in the introduction in the fourth edition of his book.

In 1988, he received yet another order from Rome directing him to give up all ministry to gay persons, an order, he said, he could not follow in good conscience.

He disobeyed the order and this led to his expulsion from the Jesuit order, his home for nearly 40 years.

He continued to speak out against official Catholic teachings on matters or sexuality and in particular the harsh and "homophobic" teachings coming out of the Vatican. It was in 1986 in that Ratzinger issued a document in which he called homosexuality "an objective disorder" and spoke of its "orientation to evil." The document was issued on Oct. 31, 1986, and McNeill, among other church critics, referred to the Ratzinger letter as "the Halloween letter."

In 2012, McNeill was the subject of "Taking a Chance on God," a documentary film produced and directed by Dignity member Brendan Fay that highlights McNeill's role as priest, gay man, activist, and scholar.

He did not mince words when speaking of the pain he had felt at the hands of his church. In 2012, McNeill wrote that in his outspoken career he had tried "with the help of the Holy Spirit to free gay Christians from the lies of a pathologically homophobic religion."

His radical and provocative views on sexuality were never successfully muzzled by church authorities, though his presence at gay and lesbian Catholic meetings grew fewer and fewer as his health diminished in recent years. He published at several major best-selling books on sexuality and he kept a website for many years.

His pastoral approach toward healing the pain gay and lesbian Catholics were experiencing seemed boundless. Several years ago he wrote "We know from Revelation that God created us sexual beings and delights in our sexual play. Every human being has a God-given right to sexual fulfillment. … As a psychotherapist with several decades of experience that many, if not most, human beings grow up with badly damaged psyches and a wounded self-image that render them incapable, except with extreme difficulty, to enter into a committed relation based on mutual love. However, these psychically wounded humans still have a right to sexual fulfillment to the best of their ability."

He believed that individual conscience needs to be the final arbiter when deciding on sexual matters. He once wrote: "one of the most central teachings of Jesus, without doubt of utmost importance to all Christians and especially to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered Christians is freedom of conscience."

He was animated by a deep spirituality. He once wrote that his writings had been based on "Jesus' promise to his followers to send them the Holy Spirit who will dwell in their hearts and lead them into all truth." +

A Catholic University Wishes Professor "Many Blessings" After He Marries His Same-Sex Partner

By J. Lester Feder
Buzzfeed.com
July 14, 2015

A Catholic university in New York City has said it will take no action against the chair of its theology department after he married his same-sex partner on June 27, in contrast to the several parochial K-12 schools that have fired gay and lesbian employees who marry.

The marriage of Fordham University Theology Professor J. Patrick Hornbeck and Patrick Bergquist — who directs the family ministry of St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in Manhattan — was announced in the "Weddings" section of *The New York Times* the day after their ceremony.

In response to an inquiry from *BuzzFeed News*, Fordham University provided a statement from Senor Director of Communications Bob Howe saying that university wished the best for Hornbeck and his husband.

"While Catholic teachings do not support same-sex marriage, we wish Professor Hornbeck and his spouse a rich life filled with many blessings on the occasion of their wedding in the Episcopal Church. Professor Hornbeck is a member of the Fordham community, and like all University employees, students and alumni, is entitled to human dignity without regard to race, creed, gender, and sexual orientation," Howe said in a statement that had been released previously. "Finally, same-sex unions are now the law of the land, and Professor Hornbeck has the same constitutional right to marriage as all Americans."

J. Patrick Hornbeck, right,
with husband, Patrick Bergquist

Fordham's response to Hornbeck's marriage has been attacked in a number of conservative Catholic websites over the past two weeks, apparently beginning with Patheos.

Fordham University describes itself as "both Catholic and Jesuit" in identity, and invokes Catholic doctrine in other areas, including prohibiting the distribution of birth control.

"As an institution in the Catholic, Jesuit tradition, Fordham University follows Church teachings on reproductive issues," states the university's student handbook.

"Distribution of contraceptives, contraceptive devices and/or birth control, in any form, is prohibited on Fordham University property and at University-sponsored events."

The New York Archdiocese did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Fordham's response to Hornbeck's marriage. Neither Hornbeck nor his husband could be reached for comment.

Hornbeck's marriage follows controversies in several archdiocese around the country where gay and lesbian teachers at Catholic K-12 schools have been fired after marrying their same-sex partners. The most recent firing to make national news was at the Waldron Mercy Academy just outside Philadelphia, where the archdiocese will host a large family summit in September that is scheduled to include a visit by Pope Francis.

The Academy notified parents at the end of the school year that it was not renewing the contract of its longtime director of religious education, Margie Winters, because of her marriage to Andrea Vettori. Vettori appealed directly to the pope to intercede in a letter made public on July 1. +

Gay-Friendly Catholic Colleges and Universities

Below is a list of known gay-friendly Catholic colleges and universities, that is, those Catholic institutions that have some type of gay/lesbian student group, support group, ally group, etc. If you are aware of such a college that is known as welcoming to gay/lesbian people, please let us know.

Alabama
Mobile: Spring Hill College

California
Belmont: Notre Dame de Namur University
Goleta: St. Mark's University
Los Angeles: Loyola Marymount University, Mount Saint Mary's College
Moraga: St. Mary's College
Oakland: Holy Names University
Ranchos Palos Verde: Marymount College
San Diego: University of San Diego
San Francisco: University of San Francisco
Santa Clara: Santa Clara University

Colorado
Denver: Regis University

Connecticut
Fairfield: Fairfield University, Sacred Heart University
New Haven: Albertus Magnus College
West Hartford: Saint Joseph College

District of Columbia
Georgetown University, Trinity University

Florida
Miami Gardens: St. Thomas University
Miami Shores: Barry University

Hawaii
Honolulu: Chaminade University

Illinois
Chicago: DePaul University, Loyola University, St. Xavier University
Joliet: University of St. Francis
River Forest: Dominican University in Illinois
Romeoville: Lewis University

Indiana
Notre Dame: Holy Cross College, St. Mary's College, Univ. of Notre Dame

Iowa
Davenport: St. Ambrose University
Dubuque: Loras College

Kentucky
Louisville: Spalding University, Bellarmine University

Louisiana
New Orleans: Loyola University

Maryland
Baltimore: Notre Dame of Maryland University, Loyola University of Maryland

Massachusetts
Boston: Emmanuel College,
Chestnut Hill: Boston College
Chicopee: Elms College
Easton: Stonehill College
North Andover: Merrimack College
Weston: Regis College
Worcester: Assumption College, College of the Holy Cross

Michigan
Detroit: University of Detroit Mercy
Grand Rapids: Aquinas College

Minnesota
Collegeville: St. John's University
Duluth: College of St. Scholastica
Minneapolis: College of St. Catherine
St. Joseph: College of Saint Benedict
St. Paul: St. Thomas University
Winona: St. Mary's University of Minnesota

Missouri
Kansas City: Avila University, Rockhurst University
St. Louis: Fontbonne University, St. Louis University

Montana
Helena: Carroll College

Nebraska
Omaha: Creighton University

New Hampshire
Manchester: St. Anselm College
Nashua: Rivier College

New Jersey
Caldwell: Caldwell College
Jersey City: St. Peter's College
South Orange: Seton Hall

New York
Albany: College of Saint Rose
Brooklyn and Patchogue: St. Joseph College
Bronx: Fordham University, Manhattan College
Buffalo: Canisius College
Loudonville: Sienna College
New Rochelle: College of New Rochelle, Iona College
Poughkeepsie: Marist College
Riverdale: College of Mount St. Vincent
Rochester: St. John Fisher College
St. Bonaventure: St. Bonaventure University
Sparkill: St. Thomas Aquinas College
Syracuse: LeMoyne College
Queens: St. John's University

Ohio
Cincinnati: Xavier University
Cleveland Heights: John Carroll University
Dayton: University of Dayton
Pepper Pike: Ursuline College
South Euclid: Notre Dame College
Sylvania: Lourdes College

Oregon
Marylhurst: Marylhurst University
Portland: University of Portland

Pennsylvania
Cresson: Mount Aloysius College
Dallas: Misericordia University
Erie: Mercyhurst College
Greensburg: Seton Hill University
Philadelphia: Chestnut Hill College, LaSalle University, St. Joseph's University
Pittsburgh: Carlow University, Duquesne University
Radnor: Cabrini College
Reading: Alvernia University
Scranton: Marywood University
Villanova: Villanova University

Rhode Island
Newport: Salve Regina University
Providence: Providence College

Texas
Austin: Saint Edward's University
San Antonio: University of the Incarnate Word, Our Lady of the Lake University

Vermont
Colchester: Saint Michael's College

Washington
Lacey: St. Martin's College
Seattle: Seattle University
Spokane: Gonzaga University

West Virginia
Wheeling: Wheeling Jesuit University

Wisconsin
De Pere: St. Norbert College
Madison: Edgewood College
Milwaukee: Alverno College, Cardinal Stritch University, Marquette University, Mount Mary University

Canada
Toronto: Regis College

Indian cardinal urges fellow bishops to meet LGBT people

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much by their sincerity, wanting to help the Church, generosity. Is this specific to them or just because they happen to be who they are? So, I can't generalize. But all I have met have been good people, wanting to dedicate themselves to work for the Church. When I say "for the Church, " I mean "for people, through the Church's charities."

DeBernardo: Let's talk about the synod. Do you think there is going to be any progress made on lesbian and gay issues this year?

Gracias: I can see there is a great hesitation from the synod fathers to really touch this topic. Therefore, I can see that the synod will probably say that we must receive them in pastoral care. Full stop. Something very gentle and limited. I don't expect us to be able to say very much more specific on this.

DeBernardo: Do you think it would be possible for the synod to make a statement about criminalization since that is happening around the globe?

Gracias: I feel clear about it and strongly about it. One of the criticisms of the synod is that it is too Eurocentric, and we are carefully looking into that. It's difficult at this stage to start shifting the whole focus. I'm saying this because I know that Africa is very sensitive about this topic. There's very clearly a North American-European stance on this topic. How we as a Church, as the universal Church, can take something on board, is something that we have to consider. That is really key.

DeBernardo: How about language? There's been reports that some bishops are proposing getting rid of words like "disorder" and "evil" in relation to LGBT people?

Cardinal Oswald Gracis with Pope Francis

Gracias: It should be done gently. I'm glad you brought this up. I think there would be an acceptance of saying "Let's use gentler language, not judgemental language." The response to this view is "Are you condoning it?" I personally feel that it would help us to have a more clear, objective view of this matter.

DeBernardo: Would it have been helpful to the bishops for lesbian and gay people, couples, to speak to the synod the way married couples have spoken?

Gracias: Personally, I would have thought it would have been an enrichment. I would have been happy to hear them, and I think that it would help all the synod fathers to understand. I think most have never had direct contact or discussion. I have a feeling about that. For them, it's just a theoretical opinion, but you really don't come down to the person. When you really see a person,you speak to a person, and understand the anxiety. I often think about what Our Lord's approach be in that circumstances: sympathetic, understanding.

The whole thing about the origin of sexual orientation has not been studied in-depth. Some say that it's a choice. I see that it is not a choice for many people, so it's not fair to say it is. In that sense, we are not open enough.

DeBernardo: In my ministry with LGBT people, I meet a lot of LGBT people who are thinking of leaving the Church or finding it difficult to stay in the Church. What would you say to them?

Gracias: I would say the Church embraces you, wants you, and the Church needs you. You are not someone who is a burden to the Church. The Church needs you. You are part of us. We'd like to help you, we'd like to see you more clearly. We are struggling to see how to help you more with pastoral care

I'd also say, "Don't get discouraged." At the last synod there was just one official intervention on this topic; in group discussions it would come out much more. This time there were a few more. So, I would say to[LGBT people], "Hold on. It is certainly not the end. We are still in the process, and we will find a way.

DeBernardo: What advice would you give other bishops who may be opposed to any changes on LGBT people?

Gracias: I would say to the bishops to meet with people. That's important. Meet with people. That would help us– and me also– to see flesh and blood– that this is not an academic problem but a real problem. It's not an academic case where you say "A equals B, and B equals C." There are so many ramifications.

I would say to them that the Church is an all-embracing mother. The Church is mother and teacher. The mother does not send her children away, no matter what.

DeBernardo: You gave me a chill when you said that last sentence. It was beautiful. In the. U.S. Church one of the biggest groups that pushes for the rights of LGBT people are the mothers and the fathers. We say they are a bridge because they are very dedicated to the Church and very dedicated to their children.

Gracias: The parents suffer a lot, but they understand their children. So we can't be legalistic. We cannot change church teaching or doctrine. I'm not sure we have the final word. We have to continuously study ourselves: Scripture, morality, canon law to see what we could do.

DeBernardo: Thank you for your time. I'm sure you are very busy.

Gracias: When we first started, I said "Why are we having a synod for three weeks?" Now, I'm saying, "Three weeks is not enough!" +

Is Pope Francis a transgender-friendly pope?

(Continued from page 1)

change, as part of a wider failure by humankind to respect its bodily nature.

However, as respected blogger, the Catholic Transgender, argues, 'gender theory' really is very little connected, except in the most tangential fashion, to being transgender.

This view is supported by Barltrop. He suggests the target for the Pope's concern is the notion of gender to be found in Queer Theory and the writings of Michel Foucault, as well as radical feminism, that sees gender as totally constructed and constructible.

So while it is likely to impinge to some degree on those segments of the trans community that define themselves in more gender fluid terms, it is certainly not the out and out attack on transgender it has been represented as.

Or as explained in *Il Post*, an Italian magazine, the real issue is not the trans community, but feminist thinkers, such as Judith Butler.

Does it matter if the press gets it wrong? Unfortunately yes. And this year it could matter more than most.

This autumn, bishops of the world assemble once more, as they did a year ago, at Rome for part two of the synod on the family. On the agenda will be discussion of the Church's attitude to the LGBTI community.

There will not be any grand overturning of centuries of disapproval. But it is likely, as liberals hope, and conservatives fear, that there will be a significantly more open attitude. And once out of the box, it will be hard to put such positivity away again.

Barltrop told us: 'In practice gay and trans people are going to meet a variety of attitudes from priests and lay people, ranging from warm support to suspicion.

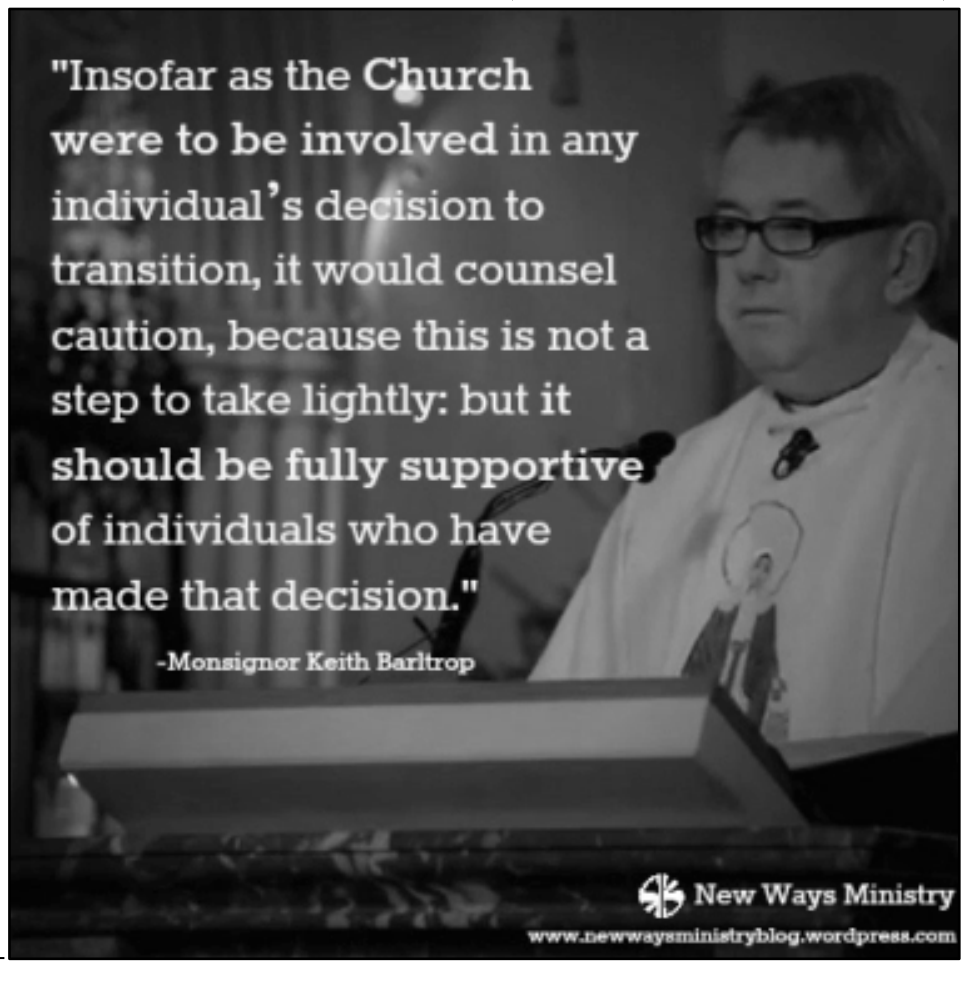
'But the official teaching of the Church is clear: homosexual and transgendered people are not only to be respected but made to feel welcome in the Church and accompanied as they journey, along with everyone else, to be more like Christ who radiates nothing but love.

'If priests take this teaching seriously, as well as engaging with their congregations and reading the newspapers, then it is less likely that reports in the LGBT press that the Catholic Church disapproves of transgenderism will become self-fulfilling prophecy.'

In other words, we should be careful what we write. The press is not entirely neutral observer to the news, but active participant in it.

A quick Google of the timeline for this issue suggests that many of the pieces appearing in the wider press, including influential right-wing and anti-trans outlets such as CNN and evangelical Catholic publications, appear to follow directly on from scare stories appearing in the LGBTI media.

The bottom line: If we are too enthusiastic in claiming that the Church is against us, we may yet succeed in making it so. +



For more news and analysis on gender identity issues in the Catholic Church, visit *Bondings 2.0* at www.NewWaysMinistryBlog.wordpress.com and select the 'Transgender' category.

Gay Former Student Of Pope Francis Details Pope-Initiated Meeting During U.S. Visit

(Continued from page 3)

Washington.

Late on Friday, the Vatican confirmed the meeting. "Mr. Yayo Grassi, a former Argentine student of Pope Francis, who had already met other times in the past with the pope, asked to present his mother and several friends to the Pope during the Pope's stay in Washington, D.C.," Father Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, said in a statement.

"As noted in the past, the pope, as pastor, has maintained many personal relationships with people in a spirit of kindness, welcome and dialogue," the statement added.

Earlier on Friday, the Vatican said that Archbishop Viganò had arranged the pope's meetings in Washington, including the one with Ms. Davis.

The news of the meeting with Ms. Davis was disclosed late Tuesday night by Ms. Davis's lawyer, Mathew D. Staver, at the same time it was reported on the website of Inside the Vatican, a conservative publication edited by an American who has covered the Vatican for years.

For nearly eight hours, Vatican officials refused to confirm or deny that the meeting had occurred, before finally confirming it on Wednesday afternoon.

For Francis, the timing of the Davis controversy is not ideal. Beginning Sunday the Vatican is staging a critical three-week meeting of bishops and laypeople to discuss whether to recommend changing their approach to contemporary issues related to the family, like gay couples, single parents or whether divorced and remarried Catholics who have not obtained annulments should be allowed to receive communion.

That meeting, known as a synod, could become a showdown between liberals and conservatives. Francis has spent nearly two years trying to gradually build consensus and has repeatedly stated his desire for a more welcoming, merciful outreach — even as he has not signaled any willingness to change church doctrine.

News of his meeting with Ms. Davis buoyed Christian conservatives, who had been dismayed that the pope, in his emphasis on the poor, barely mentioned issues like abortion and homosexuality during his visit to Washington, New York and Philadelphia. It also puzzled and angered more liberal observers.

It also led observers of the Vatican to speculate about whether the encounter with Ms. Davis was a signal of support for her cause. Francis has emphasized that he strongly believes in conscientious objection as a human right, a position he reaffirmed on his plane ride home.

On Friday, the Vatican appeared to be distancing itself from Ms. Davis's camp. Father Lombardi's statement said that the brief meeting "has continued to provoke comments and discussion," and that he was providing clarification "in order to contribute to an objective understanding of what transpired."

The Vatican's statement prompted reactions on both sides of the Atlantic.

In a phone interview on Friday, Mr. Staver said the meeting had been called by the Vatican.

"This was a private meeting initiated by the Vatican," Mr. Staver said. "My contacts were Vatican officials in the United States. And I was informed the request came directly from the pontiff."

Mr. Staver said the request had come on Sept. 14, the day Ms. Davis returned to work after her release from jail. Ms. Davis and her husband were picked up at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in a tan van by private security guards who spoke Italian, he said. She had been instructed to change her hairstyle so she would not be identified.

Mr. Staver said Ms. Davis was not among a large group of people meeting the pope. She saw no one else waiting to see the pope and no one else saw her. "Just think about it. If she was in a line, there is no way this could have been kept secret for five days," he said.

But at the Vatican on Friday, a spokesman, the Rev. Thomas Rosica, said the invitation had been extended by the nuncio's office — not from Rome.

"Who brought her in? The nuncio," said Father Rosica, who is working with the Vatican's media office in advance of a major meeting of bishops that begins this weekend. "The Nunciature was able to bring in donors, benefactors."

Father Rosica said of the controversy: "I would simply say: Her case is a very complex case. It's got all kinds of intricacies. Was there an opportunity to brief the pope on this beforehand? I don't think so. A list is given — these are the people you are going to meet."

Mr. Staver, for his part, said he had been briefly introduced to Archbishop Viganò in April, when he spoke at a large rally in Washington against same-sex marriage, before the Supreme Court ruled on the issue.

The Rev. James Martin, editor at large of the Jesuit magazine *America*, had cautioned in an article this week that the pope meets many well-wishers on his trips, and that news of the meeting with Ms. Davis had been manipulated.

"I was very disappointed to see the pope having been used that way, and that his willingness to be friendly to someone was turned against him," Father Martin said in an interview on Friday. "What may originally have prevented them from issuing a statement was the desire not to give this story too much air. But what they eventually came to realize was that they needed to correct some gross misrepresentations of what had happened. It shows that Pope Francis met with many people on the trip, and that she was simply another person who he tried to be kind to."

Father Rosica's statement seemed to square with that account.

Asked on Friday if the Vatican press office had been unaware that Ms. Davis had met the pope, Father Rosica said: "No, but I think we may not have been aware of the full impact of the meeting. It is very difficult sometimes when you are looking at things in America from here."

A receptionist who answered the phone at the Vatican Embassy in Washington on Friday said, "The nuncio does not deny that the meeting took place, but would not make any further comment."

She said the embassy did not have its own spokesman, and that no other officials there would comment.

Archbishop Viganò is turning 75 in January, the age at which bishops must submit a formal request to the Vatican asking for permission to resign. These requests are not automatically accepted, and bishops often stay in their appointments well past age 75. But if Archbishop Viganò is held responsible for what is seen as a grave misstep on an important papal trip, he is likely to be removed at the first respectable opportunity, according to several church analysts.

"Nobody in the Catholic Church wants another Regensburg," said Massimo Faggioli, an associate professor of theology and director of the Institute for Catholicism and Citizenship at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul. He was referring to the backlash after Pope Benedict XVI, Francis' predecessor, gave a speech in Regensburg, Germany, that appeared to denigrate Islam.

"This was not as serious as Regensburg, when Benedict read his own speech," Dr. Faggioli said about the meeting attended by Ms. Davis. "But the pope has to be able to rely on his own system, and in this case the system failed him. The question is, was it a mistake, or was it done with full knowledge of how toxic she was?"

The meeting with Ms. Davis was clearly a misstep, Dr. Faggioli said, "because the whole trip to the United States he very carefully didn't want to give the impression that he was being politicized by any side."

He added, "And this thing is the most politicized thing that you can imagine." +

Pope Francis greeting Yayo Grassi, left, and his partner Iwan

Synod Final Report: Not Much Is Said, But A Lot Has Changed

Bondings 2.0
NewWaysMinistryBlog.wordpress.com
October 24, 2015

The following is a statement of Francis DeBernardo, New Ways Ministry's Executive Director, on the final report of the Vatican's Synod on Marriage and the Family:

While the final report of the Vatican's Synod on the Family has not said much in regard to LGBT issues, in fact, a great deal has changed in regard to the discussion on these topics at the highest levels of the Church.

In paragraph 76, the synod's final report focused its discussion of homosexuality solely on families with lesbian and gay members in them. This is a step in the right direction, but it must not be the last step. The other remarks–disapproving of same-gender marriages, and connecting international financial aid to marriage equality laws–have been stated before and are not surprising in this context, however, it is disappointing to see them repeated.

Most disappointing are the references in paragraph 8 to "gender ideology." The remarks show that the bishops do not understand the transgender experience or how people experience their gender identity, which is often received as a spiritual, life-giving revelation. More education in this area is needed in the church, particularly for our bishops.

The reference in paragraph 65 that adopted children should be raised by a mother and a father is also disappointing. This statement denigrates the many heroic sacrifices made by lesbian and gay couples raising children unwanted by others, as well as the many single parent households raising children, often under very stressful economic and social conditions.

Helping to heal family divisions that exist because of lack of understanding of homosexuality or ignorance of Catholic teaching respecting the human dignity of lesbian and gay people is an important and needed ministry, especially in countries where awareness levels are low. In the United States, ministry with families such as these has been a great, shining hope for LGBT equality, as parents and family members advocate for including their loved ones in the Church.

Last year's synod opened the door for greater discussion of LGBT issues in the Church. While the discussion was not as explicit this year, we saw a variety of interesting specific proposals that could eventually have a positive effect on the Church's pastoral ministry with LGBT people: a transformation of Church language which has been offensive, harmful, and inaccurate; the need for local bishops to be allowed to respond more pastorally given the unique attitudes and practices of their communities; the desire for the Church to be more of a listening presence and accompanying friend instead of a disciplinarian rule giver.

We heard bishops willing to speak up for lesbian and gay people, including an apology from the German speaking bishops for the harm that Church. We heard bishops say that pastoral ministry must go forward regardless of whether a person's opinions and life conform to the Church's teaching. We heard bishops say that the road has been paved for a better discussion of these issues in the future.

Even though this synod did not achieve a stronger statement of LGBT acceptance, the movement for a more inclusive and equal Church for LGBT members can take hope from this meeting because the discussion has moved forward and we've heard that a large number of bishops see the need for this discussion to continue into the future.

We are heartened by the proposal coming from one of the English speaking groups, and also Belgian Bishop Johan Bonny, for a totally separate synod in the future on LGBT issues. Such an endeavor would not only give the time and focus needed to look at the myriad questions involved–including questions of gender identity, absent entirely from this synod– but also to hear, first-hand, from LGBT people themselves, their families, and pastoral ministers.

The bishops at this synod said they want a church that is a listening church. In 1997, the U.S. bishops, in their pastoral letter *Always Our Children*, on families with lesbian and gay members, advised pastoral ministers: "Strive first to listen." If bishops, pastoral ministers, and all Catholics will follow this sound, pastoral advice, they can transform the church into a welcoming and inclusive community for all, including our LGBT brothers and sisters.

Bishops gathered in the Synod Hall
credit: Francis DeBernardo

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LIVE FROM ROME!

New Ways Ministry's Francis DeBernardo covered last fall's Synod on the Family from Rome.

To read his daily reports and analysis, including exclusive interviews with bishop participants, please visit:
newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/category/synod-2015/

Hundreds shut out of sole session on gay people at World Meeting of Families

By Kimberley Winston
Religion News Service
September 25, 2015

Homosexuality was such a combustible topiac at the World Meeting of Families, a four-day Catholic gathering under way here, that it was doused twice.

First, Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput earlier this month barred LGBT Catholics from holding a workshop at a Catholic parish near the event. It moved to a local United Methodist Church instead and is operating simultaneously, but with vastly smaller numbers than the 17,000 people on hand for the main event at the Pennsylvania Convention Center.

Then, just as the single session on homosexuality at this Vatican-approved meeting of Catholic families was to begin on Thursday afternoon (Sept. 24), a conference official took the stage in the main hall, capable of seating at least 10,000, and announced the location had been moved.

Thousands of people got up and made their way up one floor to another room capable of seating only about 1,000. Hundreds of others were turned away, the doors shut on them by convention center officials citing fire code regulations.

Inside the session, it was standing room only, with some people sitting on the floors and in the aisles. All were silent as Ron Belgau, the sole openly gay man allowed to make a presentation here, took the microphone and, with his mother Beverley, described how he follows a "traditional Christian sexual ethic" that says homosexual activity is sinful.

"Some people have described me as the official face of gay celibate Catholics," Belgau, 40, said from a small podium at the front of the room.

"But the last thing I want after this session is people looking at me. Every parish has gay kids, every family has a member suffering with same-sex attraction. I hope that when you return to your parishes you will be able to accompany them in whatever struggles they face and speak up" against the stigma of same-sex attraction.

At that, the crowd broke into applause — something they did multiple times throughout the session. They seemed especially absorbed when Belgau's mother, Beverley, took the podium and described her son's coming out at age 21 as "the worst day of my life."

"You may think the fact that he is celibate makes my life easier, and in some way it does," she said. "But to be attracted to the same sex and publicly celibate in a sexually free society is no easy road to walk."

World Meeting of Families organizers were not immediately available to answers questions about the last-minute move to another room.

But for members of Equally Blessed, a coalition of several groups supportive of LGBT Catholics who are not celibate, the move was an echo of the earlier rebuffs.

"We are just trying to understand and give them the benefit of the doubt," said Ryan Hoffmann, director of communications for Call to Action, one of the groups in Equally Blessed.

Hoffmann was there with several members of Equally Blessed. He characterized Ron Belgau's appearance as "generous," "sincere" and "courageous."

But he added: "The frustration is that he didn't speak to the many expressions of love LGBT Catholics and their families experience every day."

Still, he said, the fact that so many were turned away is a positive sign.

"This just speaks to the fact that people want to talk about LGBT Catholics and their relationship with the Catholic Church," Hoffmann said. +

Catholics Welcome Pope to Philly with Gender Identity Workshop

Sr. Jeannine Gramick introduces Nicole Santamaria, right, an intersex woman from El Salvador, and her mother, Vilma who were among the speakers at New Ways Ministry's daylong workshop on gender identity issues from a Catholic context on September 26, 2015 during Pope Francis' visit to the U.S. The event was held across the street from the Vatican-sponsored World Meeting of Families at the Arch Street Methodist Church.

Vatican fires gay priest on eve of synod on the family

By Nicole Winfield
CruxNow.com
October 3, 2015

The Vatican on Saturday fired a monsignor who came out as gay on the eve of a big meeting of the world's bishops to discuss Church outreach to gays, divorcees, and more traditional Catholic families.

The Vatican took action after Krzysztof Charamsa, a mid-level official in its doctrine office, came out in newspaper interviews in Italy and Poland saying he was happy and proud to be a gay priest, and that he was in love with a man whom he identified as his boyfriend.

"The decision to make such a pointed statement on the eve of the opening of the synod appears very serious and irresponsible, since it aims to subject the synod assembly to undue media pressure," the Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, said in a statement.

As a result, Charamsa can no longer work at the Vatican or its pontifical universities, Lombardi said. Despite his dismissal, Charamsa remains a priest, although Lombardi hinted that his superiors could take further action.

Charamsa, 43, initially planned a press conference in front of the office of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, but moved it to central Rome after the Vatican action. He was joined by his companion, identified only as Eduard.

Charamsa told reporters that the timing of his disclosure was not related to the bishops meeting on the family, but said he hoped it might add "a Christian voice" to the synod that is expected to address how the Church can better minister to the gay faithful.

"I came out. This is a very personal, difficult, and tough decision in the Catholic Church's homophobic world," Charamsa said, and asked people to bear this in mind.

He said he has written a book in Italian and Polish to "lay bare" his experience "in front of all those who want to confront me."

Charamsa told the Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* that he was motivated to make his sexual orientation public by hate mail that he received after publicly criticizing a right-wing Polish priest who is strongly anti-gay in the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*.

"I have to say who I am. I am a gay priest. I am a happy and proud gay priest," he told *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

"Do not apologize for what you are," he said in comments meant for the LGBT community, "because you're full members of the community, and in the case of the baptized, of the Church. [You're part of a] civilized community, and the Church doesn't have the moral right to deny your right to love and get married."

He also called for all gay Catholics "persecuted by the Church" to fight "for their dignity and right to happiness."

In the past 30 months, Francis has defrocked more than one priest, not because they were gay, but because of their outspoken defense of gay marriage.

One such case is Australian Greg Reynolds, founder of the breakaway church Inclusive Catholics, who received a letter of excommunication signed by the pontiff in September 2013.

Vatican observers said it likely Charamsa was removed from the CDF not because he is gay, but because he broke his vow of celibacy and is advocating a position that is contrary to Church teaching.

For example, the Rev. Robert Pierson is an openly gay priest who ministers to gays and lesbians.

He remains a priest, but for how long is up to his bishop. +

Archbishop Cupich: Synod Would Have Gained from Hearing from Lesbian and Gay Couples Experiences

By Francis DeBernardo
Bondings 2.0
NewWaysMinistryBlog.wordpress.com
October 17, 2015

In an unscheduled press conference at the Synod on Friday, Chicago's Archbishop Blase Cupich agreed that it would have been helpful for the meeting's process to have lesbian and gay people, as well as those divorced and remarried, address the bishops.

In a crowded room filled with reporters, Cupich, who was appointed archbishop of Chicago by Pope Francis, and also appointed to the synod by the pontiff, spoke candidly of the synod process in an upbeat and genial tone. When I had the chance, I asked him:

"Would it have been helpful to the bishops and synod participants to hear from gay and lesbian couples, divorced couples, people who disagree with the current teaching or whose consciences have told them something else?"

Cupich answered quickly and matter-of-factly:

"Yes, it may have been. I know that myself, when I did the consultation in my diocese, I *did* have those voices as part of my consultation, and put that in my report, and so maybe that's the way they were represented. But I do think that we could benefit from the actual voices of people who feel marginalized rather than having them filtered through the voices of other representatives or the bishops. There is something important about that, I have found personally."

Cupich, who had mentioned that the Church should accompany divorced/remarried people in conscience formation, was asked by another reporter if he thought the same principle would apply to same-sex couples in the Church, an area that is a newly public phenomenon, given the advent of marriage equality. Cupich's answer was again simple and direct:

"Gay people are human beings, too. They have a conscience, and my role as a pastor is to help them discern what the will of God is, by looking at the objective moral teaching of the Church, and yet, at the same time, helping them through a period of discernment to understand what God is calling them to at that point. It's for everybody. We have to make sure that we don't pigeonhole one group as though they're not part of the human family–so that there's a different set of rules for them. That would be, I think, a big mistake. "

Another reporter asked about the rumors that the synod may revise moral language such as "indissolubility" and "disordered," and Cupich replied:

"We have to speak to families the way families recognize themselves. Yes, it's important to have various principles, general principles, categories, words from our tradition, and so on. And, yet, if we really *do*want to engage people, they have to recognize that we know their life [through] the way that we speak."

Speaking about the much debated topics of mercy for people and calling them to conversion, Cupich offered this analysis:

"We have to believe in the mercy of God and the grace of God to trigger conversion rather than having it the other way around, as though you're only going to get mercy if you have the conversion. The economy of salvation doesn't work that way. Christ *receives* people, and it's because of that mercy that the conversion happens many, many times in the Scriptures."

Cupich spoke about the need for the Church to start treating adult people as adults, guiding them along the way, but allowing them to develop their consciences. *The National Catholic Reporter* provided his comments in this regard:

" 'I try to help people along the way,' said Cupich. 'And people come to a decision in good conscience.'

" 'Then our job with the church is to help them move forward and respect that,' he said. 'The conscience is inviolable. And we have to respect that when they make decisions and I've always done that.' "

Archbishop Blasé Cupich

He went on to expand on this idea more fully:

" 'We have the means by which we can help people come to important decisions about how they live their Christian life,' said Cupich. 'This is a moment that I think highlights the need for that kind of catechesis all the more.'

" Catechesis cannot be just about giving people the fixed doctrines … but also helping them, accompanying them by showing them the way, the path that the church has outlined in terms of making prudent decisions,' he said.

"The Chicago archbishop also quoted a 2009 document from the International Theological Commission on the role of natural law, saying it is 'a very important piece for this Synod.'

"That document states: 'In morality pure deduction by syllogism is not adequate. The more the moralist confronts concrete situations, the more he must have recourse to the wisdom of experience, an experience that integrates the contributions of the other sciences and is nourished by contact with men and women engaged in the action.'

" 'We can't just refer to doctrines as though they're syllogisms that we deduce a conclusion to,' said Cupich. 'There has to be that integration of a person's circumstances, case by case in their life.' . . .

" 'Syllogisms are important,' he said. 'General principles are important. But there's a limitation on how that allows us the freedom to address real life situations that I believe is in concert with what the church teaches.' "

Crux captured another part of the interview where Cupich spoke about the power of personal encounters:

"He said that it is important for Church leaders to listen to and engage with individual believers in order to understand their issues as they craft appropriate pastoral responses.

" 'If we're really going to accompany people, we have to first of all engage them,' he said. 'In Chicago, I visit regularly with people who feel marginalized, whether they're the elderly, or the divorced and remarried, gay and lesbian individuals, also couples.'

" 'I think we need to really get to know what their life is like if we're going to accompany them,' he continued."

After 12 days of being at the synod, Cupich's presentation was the most refreshing pastoral contribution I have heard yet.

While *this* synod may not produce our hoped-for outcomes, I had a sense today that if Pope Francis continues to appoint bishops in the mold of Cupich, the *next* synod, or any future discussion of marriage and family, will certainly be very positive. +

On gay marriage, let spirit guide the church

By Joan Dawson, James J. Maguire, and Mary Scullion
Philadelphia Inquirer
July 21, 2015

The recent controversy at Waldron Mercy Academy brings to light that we are at a critical moment for the Catholic Church, and for all persons of faith and conscience in this country. It is a moment rife with pain and struggle, but also hope.

As is now well known, the academy did not renew the contract of Margie Winters, a longtime teacher and director of religious education, reportedly in response to a complaint from a parent about her seven-year same-sex marriage. This local crisis comes shortly after the U.S. Supreme Court's historic decision legalizing same-sex marriage in the United States, which directly conflicts with Church teachings.

As a parent of a Waldron Mercy graduate, a Catholic lay leader and philanthropist, and a member of the Sisters of Mercy (which sponsors the school), this issue has personal ramifications for each of us. We are deeply grieved by Margie's dismissal. We recognize that the decision was made by persons in authority acting in light of official church teaching; and we respect those church leaders who desire to maintain the character of the church through fidelity to church teachings. We know as well that beyond the Catholic community, many U.S. Christians are alarmed and angry at the interpretation of marriage equality as blatant defiance of traditional Christian theology, and are concerned about the integrity of the faith in our society.

But we believe that the Church's truest integrity is at risk when it emphasizes orthodoxy and doctrine without meaningful engagement with human and historic realities. We love the Church: We draw deeply from its rich traditions of spirituality, compassion, service, and justice. But we also recognize (and need to take responsibility for) our many historic blind spots — persecution of heretics, oppression of indigenous peoples in the name of "mission," and second-class status for women.

While it is painful for us to have to publicly dissent, we are convinced that this is a moment when insistence on doctrinal adherence is clashing with what we believe the Spirit is unfolding in our history — just as it has in the past, with issues like slavery, the rights of women, and the environment. Many Christian denominations have listened to the movement of the Spirit and moved toward both full inclusion and full embrace of the gifts of our gay and lesbian sisters and brothers.

The Church is at its best when it listens to the Spirit speaking in our times and through human experiences. As we listen, we hear the Spirit speaking through the testimony of hundreds of parents and former students, who affirm that Margie has been a marvelous teacher and influence. She has been a gift to the Church, nurturing the faith and morals of countless young people, fostering a spirit of mercy, compassion, and justice.

We hear the Spirit speaking through Pope Francis, who has insisted that the true character of the Church is not limited to a set of beliefs; while the doctrines of faith are important, they find their true expression in lived experience. "Truth, according to the Christian faith, is God's love for us in Jesus Christ," he has said. "Therefore, truth is a relationship." We understand that the Holy Father upholds church teaching as well — but we also hear him challenging the Church to a spirit of openness, to reflecting and discerning signs of the time. "If the Christian is a restorationist, a legalist, if he wants everything clear and safe, then he will find nothing. Tradition and memory of the past must help us to have the courage to open up new areas to God."

We believe the controversy surrounding Margie Winters is the Spirit inviting us to reflect on Church doctrine that upholds the dignity of every person. As we work through the pain and conflict, as we listen to each other, as we struggle to make sense of the power of tradition and the challenge of newness, we believe this can be a moment of hope and grace. May we come to a deeper and richer understanding of love, a more fervent commitment to justice, and a fuller spirit of community. In doing so, we learn more profoundly what it means to be Church, and how the Church can truthfully, faithfully, and prophetically serve and heal our society. +

Officially sanctioned Baltimore, Maryland parish group welcomes LGBT Catholics

By Peter Feuerherd
National Catholic Reporter
November 25, 2015

(From left) Gweyn Brown, Vania Christian dos Passos, Rachel Christian dos Passos

It's Sunday after 11 a.m. Mass and there's a meeting in a basement at St. Matthew's Church here.

On the wall is a portrait of the photo of the Knights of Columbus founder. The two dozen or so gathered around a conference table-- most of them women -- begin with a discussion of a future fundraiser: How much should we charge for the donated apple cider? What about the cookies? After these questions are answered, a couple who will be married next week are congratulated, with jesting warnings about punctuality and the upcoming ceremony.

So begins the monthly meeting of LGBT Educating & Affirming Diversity (LEAD), with all the trappings of a typical parish organization gathering, businesslike yet informal, with its very presence at the heart of questions currently rocking a church dealing with competing questions about tradition and inclusion.

As the church moves from describing homosexuality as "intrinsically disordered" to Pope Francis' famous question "Who am I to judge?", the big questions loom in the background as LEAD pushes on with its fellowship, sharing stories about what this group means to its members. They freely express estrangement from the church universal, yet share the peace and solace they've discovered at St. Matthew's. It's a parish which boasts 45 flags in its sanctuary in a tribute to its ethnic diversity and offers rainbow colored pins with the fish Christian symbol to visitors at the LEAD meeting.

St. Matthew's prides itself on inclusion. Besides its ethnic and racial diversity, the Sunday liturgy is signed for the deaf. The sign of peace ritual extends for more than five minutes. Through LEAD, gays and lesbians have been formally invited into the mix. The result has been gratifying to those who have been extended a welcome.

"I love God, and I love myself, and it's unfair to think I have to choose between the two," said Victoria Moore, a lesbian raised in a southern town whose relationship with her mother became strained after she came out. After moving to Baltimore last year, Moore, raised in a Protestant church, found a home at St. Matthew's.

Vania Christian dos Passos, a former nun, said that closeted gays and lesbians were often provided a discreet place around the table in Catholic parishes. Yet, she said, "we don't want the crumbs from the table." Sitting next to her spouse, Rachel, Vania said she wants to fully participate in church life.

The meeting continued, with stories flowing about coming out, including reflections from parents and friends. A central theme emerges: it is not easy within the Catholic religious tradition. Some seek St. Matthew's out from far-flung Baltimore suburbs to experience what LEAD has to offer.

The group has its roots in a series of meetings in 2009 begun through New Ways Ministry, a group supportive of gay Catholics. After one gathering, the mother of a lesbian daughter and a gay son raised the challenge of what St. Matthew's Parish planned to do. After some fits and starts, the result was LEAD.

Early meetings included a showing of a video profiling Fr. Mychal Judge, the "Saint of 9/11" and New York City fire department chaplain who identified as a gay Catholic. His death while ministering to firefighters at the World Trade Center touched the world. His gay identity remained a secret, at least to many of those to whom the Franciscan priest ministered. Another St. Matthew's meeting on families' reaction to what it means to come out as gay attracted nearly 70 participants.

The group's mission statement calls for "modeling a community of faith and spirit that works toward openness and understanding" and that it will work to "continue to grow and demonstrate a unity of faith that transcends our differences and celebrates the gifts we are from God, our Creator." LEAD began with less than 10 and has now more than doubled in size.

Committed to what participants call a safe place to gather, LEAD has been public in its witness. Its participation in this year's Baltimore Gay Pride Parade elicited comments from onlookers surprised to see formal Catholic participation in an archdiocese led by Archbishop William Lori, a prominent opponent of gay marriage, who lobbied against a Maryland same-sex marriage initiative that passed in 2012.

Fr. Joseph Muth, pastor of St. Matthew's for the past 25 years, has carefully navigated the relationship with the archdiocese. A planned symposium on same-sex marriage was cancelled after objections from the Chancery. The group has been visited three times by auxiliary Bishop Denis Madden, who has pastoral responsibility for Baltimore city parishes. Muth and group leader Dick Ullrich have met with Lori. The archbishop accepted an invitation to a meeting as well.

The group maintains official sanction.

"They felt that because we cancelled the discussion (of same-sex marriage) we were willing to dialogue," said Muth. "They didn't see us as doing simply what we wanted."

The cooperation with the archdiocese -- including a feature story illustrated by a rainbow flag draped over a cross in the *Catholic Review*, the archdiocesan newspaper -- has prevented LEAD from being cast aside and marginalized, said Muth, who has extensive experience in ministry to gays and their families, including leading New Ways Ministry retreats for the past five years.

Madden told *NCR* that the archdiocese is supportive of LEAD, reflecting Francis' inclusive style.

"I was impressed by them. They are good people," he said of LEAD participants he's met.

The discussions have been candid. "They know where the church stands," said Madden. "The pope is the perfect model for such situations. He emphasizes welcoming and loving all people. But the teaching of the church remains as it is."

St. Matthew's focus is on the pope's emphasis on welcoming. In a recent homily, Muth made a point that God's love extends to all the creatures of the earth, including Baltimore's "Ravens and Orioles, straight birds and gay birds."

Those finding a safe nest with LEAD continue to come forth with their stories: a woman who was disowned by her family after coming out as a lesbian. Another unable to talk for decades about sexual orientation with her lesbian sister. Another participant talked about her niece, who came out to her when she was 12, and who committed suicide when she turned 58. Such stories, say participants, can make support groups like LEAD a matter of literal life-or-death.

Local community organizer Gweyn Brown, a mother of a lesbian, said that congregations like St. Matthew's can provide an alternative for those, like herself, seeking solace from other churches which promote an anti-gay viewpoint.

"This meeting could be a light for people outside the Catholic faith," she said, noting that LEAD has been asked to consult with the Baltimore Police Department on community relations with the gay community.

While the group does outreach, it struggles with the tensions some of its members feel towards the wider Catholic church.

LEAD offers a safe space and it's like family, said Rachel Christian dos Passos, married to Vania. It is the thread that keeps her tied to the Catholic community. It could be considered a frayed, slight thread. The couple no longer go to Mass and are members of a United Church of Christ congregation.

"LEAD is a safe space for us to be our authentic selves," she said. Still, they long for a time when "LGBT couples can be equal to straight couples in the eyes of the Catholic church."

Meanwhile, the fundraisers, conferences, and heartfelt discussions continue at St. Matthew's. LEAD offers space for LGBT and their friends who continue to grapple about what sexual orientation means in a church moving from judgmentalism yet holding to its doctrines about the ultimate meaning of love and family. Where and how they fit in remains the ongoing question for the group in the church basement gathered after 11 a.m. Mass. +

Gay-friendly Catholic Parishes & Communities

Below is a list of known ―gay-friendly‖ Catholic parishes and intentional Eucharistic communities. Thank you for helping us add to this growing list! If you are aware of a parish or community that is known as welcoming to lesbian/gay Catholics, please let us know. Tell us if this welcome is because of a support program, spirituality group, mission statement, participation in gay community events, or involvement with parents. Parishes are listed first and intentional Eucharistic communities follow. For links to many of these parishes' websites, go to NewWaysMinistry.org.

PARISHES

Alabama
Decatur: Annunciation of the Lord
Montgomery: St. Bede

Arizona
Chandler: St. Andrew
Glendale: St. Thomas More
Mesa: St. Bridget
Phoenix: St. Matthew
Scottsdale: St. Patrick
Tucson: St. Cyril of Alexandria, Ss. Peter and Paul, St. Pius X, Our Mother of Sorrows, St. Odilia

California
Berkeley: Holy Spirit Parish
Burney: St Francis of Assisi
Carlsbad: St. Patrick
Claremont: Our Lady of the Assumption
Diamond Bar: St. Denis
El Cajon: St. Luke
Encino: Our Lady of Grace
Escondido: St. Timothy
Fremont: St. Joseph - Mission San Jose
Goleta: St. Mark Univ. Parish
Hawthorne: St. Joseph (Spanish)
Hayward: All Saints
La Puente: St. Martha
Lemon Grove: St. John of the Cross
Long Beach: St. Matthew
Los Angeles: Blessed Sacrament, Christ the King, Mother of Good Counsel, St. Camillus Center-LA USC Medical Center (Spanish), St. Agatha, St. Paul the Apostle
North Hollywood: Blessed Sacrament, St. Jane Frances de Chantal, St. Patrick
Oakland: Our Lady of Lourdes
Oceanside: St. Thomas More
Orange: Holy Family Cathedral
Pasadena: Assumption of the B.V.M.
Ross: St. Anselm
Sacramento: St. Francis of Assisi
San Carlos: St. Charles
San Diego: Ascension, St. Jude Shrine
San Francisco: Most Holy Redeemer, Old St. Mary Cathedral, St. Agnes, St. Dominic
San Jose: St. Julie Billiart, St. Martin of Tours (Emmaus Community)
San Luis Obispo: Old Mission of San Luis Obispo
San Rafael: Church of San Rafael & Mission San Rafael Arcangel
Santa Barbara: OL of Guadalupe
Santa Cruz: Holy Cross
Santa Monica: St. Monica
Simi Valley: St. Rose of Lima
Spring Valley: Santa Sophia
Stanford: Catholic Community at Stanford University
South Pasadena: Holy Family
Valinda: St. Martha
Vernon: Holy Angels Catholic Church of the Deaf
Walnut Creek: St. John Vianney
West Hollywood: St. Ambrose, St. Victor
Whittier: St. Mary of the Assumption

Colorado
Arvada: Spirit of Christ
Avon: St. Edward
Colorado Springs: Sacred Heart
Denver: St. Dominic, Christ the King, Our Lady of Mount Carmel
Lafayette: Immaculate Conception
Littleton: Light of the World, St. Frances Cabrini

Connecticut
Hartford: St. Patrick-St. Anthony

Delaware
North Wilmington: Holy Child
Wilmington: St. Joseph

District of Columbia
Holy Trinity, St. Matthew Cathedral

Florida
Daytona Beach: Our Lady of Lourdes
Flagler Beach: Santa Maria del Mar
Ft. Lauderdale: St. Anthony, St. Maurice
Kissimmee: Holy Redeemer
St. Petersburg: Holy Cross
Tampa: Sacred Heart, Christ the King

Georgia
Atlanta: Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

Idaho
Boise: St. Mary

Illinois
Berwyn: St. Mary of the Celle
Chicago: Immaculate Conception, St. Clement, St. Gertrude, St. Gregory, St. Peter, St. Sylvester, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Thomas the Apostle, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Old St. Patrick, Our Lady of Lourdes
Country Club Hills: St. Emeric
Evanston: St. Nicholas
Johnston City: St. Paul
Morton Grove: St. Martha
Oak Park: Ascension, St. Catherine of Siena-St. Lucy
Schaumburg: St. Marcelline

Indiana
Evansville: St. Mary
Indianapolis: St. Thomas Aquinas

Iowa
Coralville: St. Thomas More

Kentucky
Louisville: Epiphany, Cathedral of the Assumption, St. William

Louisiana
New Orleans: St. Augustine

Maine
Portland: Sacred Heart-St. Dominic
Saco: Most Holy Trinity

Maryland
Baltimore: Corpus Christi, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius, St. Matthew, St. Vincent dePaul
Columbia: St. John the Evangelist
Gaithersburg: St. Rose of Lima
Hagerstown: St. Ann
Prince Frederick: St. John Vianney
Severn: St. Bernadette

Massachusetts
Boston: Paulist Center, St. Anthony Shrine, St. Cecilia
East Longmeadow: St. Michael
Newton: St. Ignatius
Provincetown: St. Peter
Sharon: Our Lady of Sorrows
Springfield: Sacred Heart

Michigan
Ann Arbor: St. Mary Student Parish
Detroit: St. Leo, Christ the King, Gesu Parish
Kalamazoo: St. Thomas More
St. Ignace: St. Ignatius Loyola
Westland: Ss. Simon and Jude

Minnesota
Minneapolis: St. Frances Cabrini, St. Joan of Arc

Missouri
Kansas City: Guardian Angels, St. James
St. Joseph: St. Francis Xavier
St. Louis: St. Cronan, St. Margaret of Scotland, St. Pius V

Montana
Billings: Holy Rosary, St. Pius X

Nebraska
Omaha: Holy Family, Sacred Heart

Nevada
Las Vegas: Christ the King, Guardian Angel Cathedral

New Hampshire
Merrimack: St. John Neumann
Pelham: St. Patrick

New Jersey
Lawrenceville: St. Ann
Long Beach Island: St. Francis of Assisi
Maplewood: St. Joseph
South Plainfield: Sacred Heart
Tinton Falls: St. Anselm

New Mexico
Albuquerque: Holy Family, Shrine of St. Bernadette
Espanola: Sacred Heart of Jesus

New York
Albany: St. Vincent DePaul
Baldwinsville: St. Augustine
Bellmore: St. Barnabas the Apostle
Bellport: Mary Immaculate
Binghamton: St. Francis of Assisi
Brooklyn: St. Andrew the Apostle, St. Boniface, St. Athanasius, St. Augustine, Immaculate Heart of Mary
Deer Park: Ss. Cyril and Methodius
East Islip: St. Mary
Elmira: St. Mary
Fairport: Church of the Assumption
Henrietta: Good Shepherd
Manhattan: Holy Name of Jesus, St. Francis Xavier, St. Paul the Apostle, Church of the Ascension, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis de Sales
Pittsford: Church of the Transfiguration
Rochester: Blessed Sacrament, St. Mary (Downtown), St. Monica
Syracuse: St. Lucy, All Saints
Utica: Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Historic Old St. John's
Wading River: St. John the Baptist
Wantaugh: St. Frances de Chantal
Westbury: St. Brigid

North Carolina
Charlotte: St. Peter
Durham: Immaculate Conception
Fayetteville: St. Patrick
Raleigh: St. Francis of Assisi

Ohio
Akron: St. Bernard
Cincinnati: St. George-St. Monica, St. Robert Bellarmine
Cleveland: Blessed Trinity, St. Malachi, St. Martha
Columbus: St. Thomas More Newman Center
Fairlawn: St. Hilary
Mentor: St. John Vianney
University Heights: Church of the Gesu
Westlake: St. Ladislas
Wooster: St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception

Oregon
Beaverton: Mission of the Atonement
Portland: St. Andrew, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Phillip Neri, Downtown Chapel (St. Vincent de Paul)

Pennsylvania
Philadelphia: Old St. Joseph, Old St. Mary, St. John the Evangelist, St. Vincent DePaul

Rhode Island
Providence: St. Francis Chapel, St. Mary's
Wickford: St. Bernard

Tennessee
Memphis: Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

Texas
Colleyville: Good Shepherd
Dallas: Holy Trinity
El Paso: All Saints
Houston: St. Anne

Virginia
Arlington: Our Lady Queen of Peace
Richmond: Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Sacred Heart Parish
Roanoke: St. Gerard
Triangle: St. Francis
Virginia Beach: St. Nicholas

Washington
Seattle: Christ Our Hope, St. Benedict, St. Joseph, Prince of Peace Newman Center
Tacoma: St. Leo

Wisconsin
Madison: Our Lady Queen of Peace
Menomonee Falls: Good Shepherd
Milwaukee: Good Shepherd, Prince of Peace, Trinity-Guadalupe
Wauwatosa: St. Pius X

Canada
Montreal: Holy Cross
Ottawa: St. Joseph
Toronto: Our Lady of Lourdes

England
London: Church of the Immaculate Conception (Mayfair)

INTENTIONAL EUCHARISTIC COMMUNITIES

Arizona
Scottsdale: Franciscan Renewal Center

California
Pleasanton: Catholic Community of Pleasanton

Colorado
Colorado Springs: Benet Hill Monastery

District of Columbia
Communitas

Florida
Tampa: Franciscan Center

Iowa
Iowa City: Full Circle

Maryland
Catonsville: Living Water Inclusive Catholic Community
Greenbelt: Greenbelt Catholic Community

Michigan
Grand Rapids: Marywood
Kalamazoo: Lambda Catholics

Minnesota
Minneapolis: Spirit of St. Stephen's Catholic Community

Oregon
Portland: Journey and Koinonia Catholic Community

Virginia
Arlington: NOVA Catholic Community

Washington
Olympia: Holy Wisdom Inclusive Catholic Community

Wisconsin
Madison: Holy Wisdom Monastery

To add your faith community to our list, please contact New Ways Ministry at info@newwaysministry.org or call 301-277-5674.

How the bishops should respond to the U.S. Supreme Court's same-sex marriage decision

By Thomas Reese, SJ
National Catholic Reporter
July 2, 2015

With the U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing gay marriage throughout the United States, the U.S. Catholic bishops need a new strategy going forward. The bishops' fight against gay marriage has been a waste of time and money. The bishops should get a new set of priorities and a new set of lawyers.

Some opponents of gay marriage are calling for civil disobedience, telling government officials to ignore the decision and not to perform same-sex marriages. Others are calling for a constitutional amendment to overturn the decision. Many have argued that the court decision will not put the issue to rest any more than *Roe* v. *Wade* ended the abortion debate.

First, let's make clear what the decision does not do. It does not require religious ministers to perform same-sex marriages, nor does it forbid them from speaking out against gay marriage. These rights are protected by the First Amendment. The court has also made clear that a church has complete freedom in hiring and firing ministers for any reason.

The legal status of gay marriage is similar to that of remarriage after divorce. Divorce and remarriage is legal in every state of the union, but if a church is against remarriage after divorce, its ministers are not required to perform such weddings, and its preachers can continue to denounce divorce from the pulpit. If a minister gets divorced, his church can fire him or her.

The divorce analogy is apt. The bishops would do well to look at the record of their predecessors who opposed legalizing divorce but lost. These bishops eventually accepted divorce as the law of the land while not permitting remarriage without an annulment in their churches.

Today, Catholic institutions rarely fire people when they get divorced and remarried. Divorced and remarried people are employed by church institutions, and their spouses get spousal benefits. No one is scandalized by this. No one thinks that giving spousal benefits to a remarried couple is a church endorsement of their lifestyle.

If bishops in the past could eventually accept civil divorce as the law of the land, why can't the current flock of bishops do the same for gay marriage? Granted all the publicity around the church's opposition to gay marriage, no one would think they were endorsing it.

It is time for the bishops to admit defeat and move on. Gay marriage is here to stay, and it is not the end of civilization as we know it.

Those who compare *Obergefell* v. *Hodges* to *Roe* v. *Wade* have not looked at the poll numbers. The U.S. population has stayed polarized over abortion for decades, but the support for gay marriage has continued to rise. There is absolutely no possibility of a constitutional amendment overturning the decision. Gay marriage is not a matter of life and death. While it may be an issue in this year's Republican primaries, it is not in the population as a whole.

Now that gay marriage is the law of the land, many bishops fear that the next fight will be over the religious freedom of people objecting to gay marriage.

Let's be perfectly clear. In Catholic morality, there is nothing to prohibit a Catholic judge or clerk from performing a same-sex marriage. Nor is there any moral obligation for a Catholic businessperson to refuse to provide flowers, food, space and other services to a same-sex wedding. Because of all the controversy over these issues in the media, the bishops need to be clear that these are not moral problems for Catholic government officials or Catholic businesspeople.

U.S. Supreme Court

Again, Catholic judges have performed weddings for all applicants, including Catholics who are getting married in violation of church teaching. Catholic businesspeople have provided services to any wedding party, including those of divorced Catholics marrying outside the church. Similarly, there is no moral problem for them to do the same for gay couples.

The church has sophisticated moral teaching that includes the distinction between formal and material cooperation and the elimination of moral culpability when a person is operating under compulsion.

For other believers, these may be moral issues, but not for Catholics. Because of all the rhetoric around these issues, the bishops need to make this clear for scrupulous Catholics.

Anti-discrimination laws

Currently, there is no federal law forbidding discrimination against gay people in employment or housing, but an increasing number of states are enacting such legislation. Will the bishops fight the passage of these laws out of fear of their impact on Catholic institutions?

The better strategy for the U.S. bishops is to imitate the Mormon church that worked together with gay activists on the enactment of laws against discrimination in employment and housing in Utah. In exchange for the church's support, the gay community was willing to accept exemptions for the Boy Scouts and Mormon institutions like Brigham Young University. John Wester, now archbishop of Santa Fe, N.M., supported this legislation when he was bishop of Salt Lake City.

It may be too late in some states to work out such deals because the gay activists already have the votes they need, but in other states, the church's support could make the difference in getting nondiscrimination legislation passed. In any case, making clear that the church opposes discrimination against gay people could help heal the bitter division between the church and supporters of gay rights.

It may be possible to appeal to gay pragmatists who recognize that politically, it would be smart for them to be gracious in victory. Ganging up on churches may lose them support for their primary objectives. A few minor exemptions are a small price to pay for achieving their principal goals.

There is no question that religious freedom issues will arise in the future either because of anti-discrimination laws or strings attached to government funding.

A second issue will be the provision of spousal benefits to gay employees in Catholic institutions, especially universities and hospitals. Again, these institutions already give such benefits to divorced and remarried employees. No one considers this scandalous. The fact that the church considers health care a right should be the deciding factor, not the gender of the spouse.

Finally, the most controversial issue to be faced is children of same-sex couples. Happily, it is clear that these children should be baptized and welcomed in Catholic schools.

But Catholic adoption services have lost their government funding because they refused to sponsor children with same-sex married couples, even if they are willing to refer such couples to other agencies. Ironically, these agencies did sponsor children with single gays in the past following a "don't ask, don't tell" policy about who might be living with them. It was only married gay people to whom the bishops objected.

Church officials, including the pope, have argued that every child deserves to have a mother and a father, with the inference that without a mother and a father, the child will somehow suffer. There are a number of problems with this position.

First, it casts doubt on the millions of single parents who are heroically raising their children without spousal support.

Second, it has a narrow vision of the family. The church has traditionally recognized the importance of uncles, aunts and grandparents in the raising of children. There will be other sexes in the extended families of these children.

Third, often, same-sex couples adopt children whom no one else wants. Would these children be better off in foster homes or orphanages?

Finally, there is no evidence that children of same-sex couples suffer as a result of their upbringing. The original study that argued that children raised by same-sex couples did not do as well as those raised by heterosexual couples has been proven faulty.

In a 2013 amicus brief opposing the Defense of Marriage Act, the American Sociological Association said, "The claim that same-sex parents produce less positive child outcomes than opposite-sex parents -- either because such families lack both a male and female parent or because both parents are not the biological parents of their children -- contradicts abundant social science research."

Rather, "positive child wellbeing is the product of stability in the relationship between the two parents, stability in the relationship between the parents and child, and greater parental socioeconomic resources."

The American Academy of Pediatrics agreed and supported same-sex marriage because marriage provides needed stability in children's lives: "Many studies have demonstrated that children's well-being is affected much more by their relationships with their parents, their parents' sense of competence and security, and the presence of social and economic support for the family than by the gender or the sexual orientation of their parents. Lack of opportunity for same-gender couples to marry adds to families' stress, which affects the health and welfare of all household members. Because marriage strengthens families and, in so doing, benefits children's development, children should not be deprived of the opportunity for their parents to be married."

Just as Pope Francis depended on scientific consensus when dealing with the environment, the church should also consult the best of social science before making sweeping assertions about children and families.

It is time for the U.S. bishops to pivot to the public policy priorities articulated by Pope Francis: care for the poor and the environment and the promotion of peace and interreligious harmony. Their fanatical opposition to the legalization of gay marriage has made young people look on the church as a bigoted institution with which they do not want to be associated. As pastors, they should be talking more about God's compassion and love rather than trying to regulate people's sexual conduct through laws. +