Vatican

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The Catholic Church has been slow to recognize the presence of homosexual men in the priesthood, which is why superiors must exercise care in helping gay candidates prepare for a life of celibacy or leave the seminary, Pope Francis said.

"Homosexuality is a very serious matter, which must be discerned adequately from the beginning with candidates, if it is the case. We must be demanding," the pope told Claretian Fr. Fernando Prado in the new book-interview, "The Strength of Vocation: Consecrated Life Today."

Excerpts of the pope's interview with Prado, which was conducted in August, were printed in newspapers Dec. 1 ahead of the book's release.

In 2013, Francis had told reporters, "If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord and has goodwill, then who am I to judge him?"

Some media outlets contrasted that remark with what Francis told Prado, even though Francis made it clear in the new interview that he was talking about homosexual activity among priests and religious who make vows of chastity and celibacy.

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"In consecrated life or that of the priesthood, there is no place for this type of affection," the pope said. "For that reason, the church recommends that persons with this deep-seated tendency not be accepted for ministry or consecrated life."

"Homosexual priests, religious men and women should be urged to live celibacy wholly and, especially, to be perfectly responsible, trying to never create scandal in their communities or for the holy people of God by living a double life," the pope said. "It would be better if they left the ministry or consecrated life rather than live a double life."

Francis told Prado that today "in our societies it seems that homosexuality is fashionable, and this mentality has in a way also influenced the life of the church."

Seminary and religious formation programs, he said, must be updated to take the issue seriously, help seminarians and aspirants understand themselves and the obligations of celibacy, promote maturity and enable discernment about whether a candidate is ready and able to live a celibate life.

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