News



Pope Francis greets Jesuit Fr. James Martin, author and editor at large of America magazine, during a private meeting at the Vatican in this Oct. 1, 2019, file photo. Francis has sent a message of support to a conference that will discuss LGBTQ ministry in the Catholic Church, being held June 16-18 at New York's Fordham University. Martin released the handwritten letter from Francis June 14. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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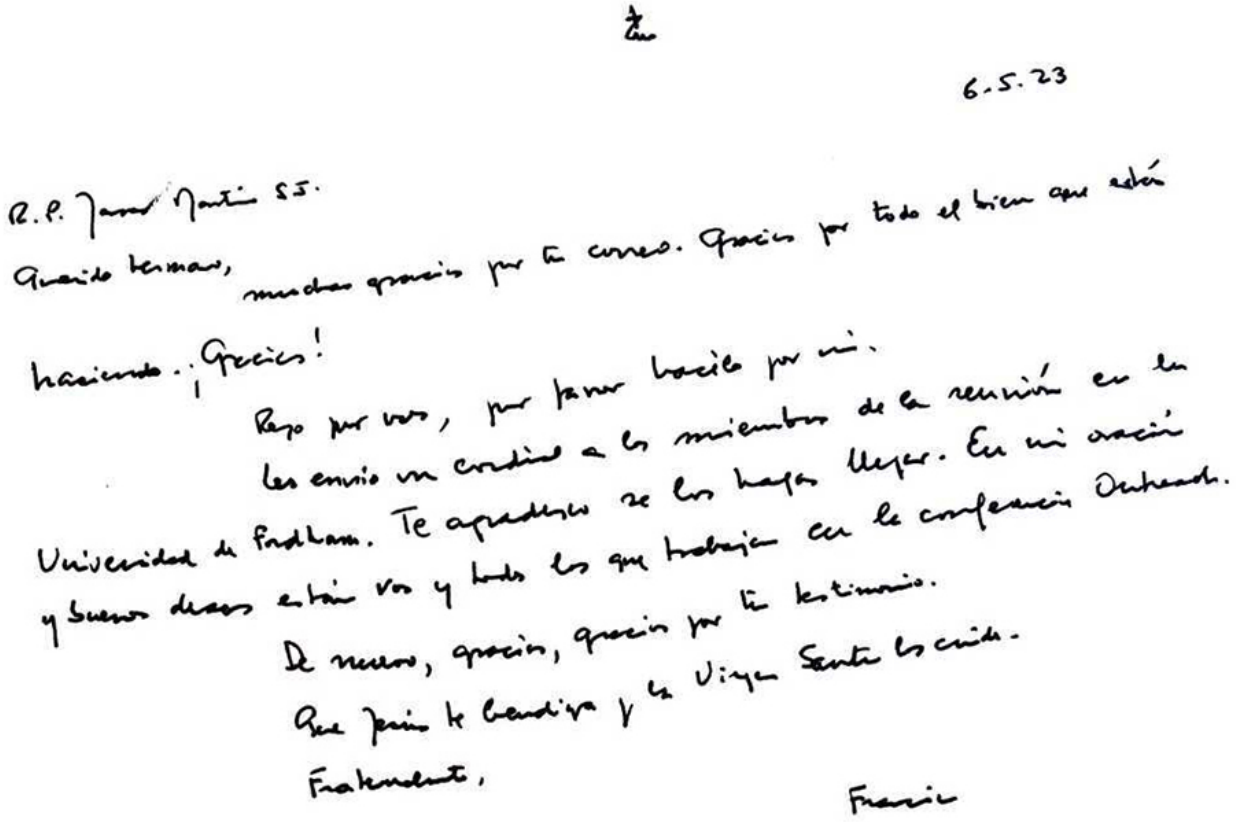
June 14, 2023

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Pope Francis has sent a message of support to a conference that will discuss LGBTQ ministry in the Catholic Church this weekend, after right-wing online influencers organized a petition to try and stop the event.

The pope is publicly backing the Outreach conference, a three-day meeting set to be held June 16-18 at New York's Fordham University that will consider issues ranging from how the Bible speaks of homosexuality, how the church should minister with transgender Catholics and how to raise LGBTQ children in the faith.

In a handwritten letter released on June 14 by Jesuit Fr. James Martin, one of the organizers of the event, Francis asks the priest to send his "best regards" to the participants of the meeting and assures: "In my prayers and good wishes are you and all who work at the Outreach Conference."



6.5.23

R.P. James Martin SJ.

Querido hermano, muchas gracias por tu correo. Gracias por todo el bien que estás haciendo. ¡Gracias!

Rezo por vos, por favor hacelo por mí.

Les envío un cordial a los miembros de la reunión en la Universidad de Fordham. Te agradezco se los hagas llegar. En mi oración y buenos deseos están vos y todos los que trabajan en la conferencia Outreach.

De nuevo, gracias, gracias por tu testimonio.

Que Jesús te bendiga y la Virgen Santa los cuide.

Fraternalmente,

Francisco

In a handwritten letter released June 14 by Jesuit Fr. James Martin, one of the organizers of the Outreach conference, Pope Francis asks the priest to send his "best regards" to the participants of the meeting and assures: "In my prayers and good wishes are you and all who work at the Outreach Conference." The conference will discuss LGBTQ ministry in the Catholic Church. (Courtesy of Fr. James Martin)

The pope's letter comes after a range of right-wing social media influencers have expressed outrage at the event. One group organized an online petition, garnering some 92,000 signatures, demanding that Fordham cancel the conference.

Also publicly supporting the conference is New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, who has written a letter welcoming those planning to attend the event.

"It is the sacred duty of the Church and Her ministers to reach out to those on the periphery and draw them to a closer relationship with Jesus and His Church," Dolan writes in the letter, released by Martin. "Your vital and important ministry is a valuable and necessary contribution to this effort."

Read full document:

Document
Letter from Cardinal Timothy Dolan.pdf

Outreach is an online news and opinion site dedicated to LGBTQ Catholics that is affiliated with the Jesuit-run America magazine. The 2023 event is the group's second in-person conference, following a similar event at Fordham in 2022.

Keynote speakers for this year's conference include Tania Tetlow, Fordham's president; Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of LGBTQ Catholic ministry DignityUSA; and Juan Carlos Cruz, a Chilean abuse survivor and member of the pope's clergy abuse commission.

Ryan Di Corpo, Outreach's managing editor, told NCR in an interview that the group feels a special urgency to their conference this year, given the recent ramp-up of controversy around LGBTQ issues.



Choir members sing during a Mass at St. Paul the Apostle Church June 25, 2022, in New York City, for participants of the Outreach LGBTQ Catholic Ministry Conference. The event, held at the church and at the Lincoln Center campus of Fordham

University June 24 and 25, drew 250 registrants from across the U.S. and from Colombia, Italy, Spain and Uganda. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)

Referencing the Human Rights Campaign's June 6 declaration of a national "state of emergency" for LGBTQ people in the U.S., Di Corpo said the conference seeks to focus on inclusion and care for all persons in the church.

"There is a tremendous body of research to show that LGBTQ youth, in comparison to their straight peers, suffer far higher rates of mental illness," said Di Corpo. "The conference says that the church must be, to use Pope Francis' terminology, a 'field hospital' for that kind of despair and that kind of rejection that people are experiencing."

"Something else that the pope has strongly emphasized throughout his papacy is this culture of encounter, which calls us to stop and actively and listen to people," he said. "I think the conference, in its own small way, is a space for that encounter to happen."

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