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Pope Francis greets visitors from the popemobile as he rides around St. Peter's Square at the

Pope Francis greets visitors from the popemobile as he rides around St. Peter's Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience Oct. 25. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



by Joshua J. McElwee

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Pope Francis greeted the leaders of an international association for LGBTQ Catholics at the end of his weekly audience in St. Peter's Square on Oct. 25.

The pontiff spoke with the co-chairs of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics, a coalition that draws together LGBTQ Catholic organizations from across six continents. Among U.S.-based members are DignityUSA, New Ways Ministry and Fortunate Families.

In an interview with National Catholic Reporter shortly after the encounter, co-chair Marianne Duddy-Burke said Francis was "incredibly gracious" and spent several minutes speaking with the group, which included co-chair Christopher Vella and two others.

Duddy-Burke, who is also the longtime leader of DignityUSA, said the four together thanked the pope for his comments earlier this year condemning countries that continue to criminalize homosexuality. She called the meeting "a big day for LGBTQ

Catholics."

"I was in tears," she said. "We have great hope for what he is trying to do to make the church more inclusive."



Pope Francis greets Marianne Duddy-Burke in St. Peter's Square Oct. 25, 2023, at the Vatican. (Courtesy of Marianne Daddy-Burke)

Duddy-Burke spoke at a conference over the summer about how she had not been invited to speak inside a Catholic Church in more than three decades because of her LGBTQ Catholic advocacy.

Upon seeing the pope on Oct. 25, she handed him a gift: a T-shirt with the Spanish words "todos, todos, todos" printed on it — from the pope's now often-cited mantra that the Catholic Church is open to "everyone, everyone, everyone."

Duddy-Burke said the pontiff immediately laughed at receiving the shirt.

Francis has focused on LGBTQ Catholics in an uncommon way over the past few weeks.

On Oct. 17, the pope held an historic, 50-minute meeting with Loretto Sr. Jeannine Gramick, a lifelong advocate for LGBTQ ministry who had previously been reprimanded by the Vatican and several U.S. bishops for her work.

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Francis also met on Sept. 29 with Jesuit Fr. James Martin, editor of the LGBTQ Catholic publication Outreach, and indicated in a letter released on Oct. 2 that he is open to allowing Catholic blessing ceremonies for same-sex couples.

The pope also recently wrote a note to the executive director of Fortunate Families, a Lexington, Kentucky-based Catholic ministry for the LGBTQ community that is part of the Rainbow Catholics coalition.

"Thank you for your ministry," Francis told Stan "JR" Zerkowski. "I pray for you, please continue to do so for me."

A version of this story appeared in the **Nov 10-23, 2023** print issue under the headline: Pope Francis meets leaders of LGBTQ ‘Rainbow Catholics’ coalition.