News



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February 6, 2024
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Giving its ministry added journalistic heft, Outreach — a news, opinion and resource site for LGBTQ Catholics that's affiliated with the Jesuit-run America magazine — has named a former Boston Globe and America reporter as its first executive director.

The organization announced Feb. 6 that author and award-winning journalist Michael O'Loughlin will fill the post, where he'll focus on fundraising, assist with strategic planning, help manage the website and annual Outreach conference, and report on LGBTQ Catholics.

"We definitely want him to continue reporting," Jesuit Fr. James Martin, a longtime advocate for LGBTQ Catholics and current editor of the site, said in an email to NCR.

There are a number of organizations that aim to provide welcome and resources to the LGBTQ Catholic community, such as New Ways Ministry, Dignity and Fortunate Families.

Outreach, founded in 2022, has featured essays, videos and news by contributing writers, as well as by its managing editor Ryan Di Corpo.



The homepage of Outreach is pictured in a Feb. 5 screengrab. Outreach has named Michael O'Loughlin, a former Boston Globe and America reporter, as its first executive director. (Outreach.faith)

It also has hosted two conferences at New York's Fordham University; last year's garnered support from Pope Francis. The 2024 conference will be in August at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

O'Loughlin, who lives in Rhode Island, most recently was national correspondent for America, and will continue to contribute to the publication. He has had work published in The New York Times, The Washington Post and elsewhere, and is the author of *Hidden Mercy: AIDS, Catholics, and the Untold Stories of Compassion in the Face of Fear*, which drew praise in the form of a personal letter from the pope.

"Honestly, when we began Outreach, I thought, 'If only we could one day hire Mike as part of our team,' " said Martin, who will continue to guide the organization in the role of founder. Along with his background in journalism and covering LGBTQ

individuals, O'Loughlin "is a kind, intelligent, thoughtful, faithful and deliberate person," the priest said.

In a recent interview with NCR, O'Loughlin said traveling around the country giving talks on *Hidden Mercy* and meeting LGBTQ Catholics, their families and allies contributed to the position's draw.



Michael O'Loughlin, author of *Hidden Mercy: AIDS, Catholics, and the Untold Stories of Compassion in the Face of Fear,* which drew praise via a personal letter from the pope (Courtesy of Michael O'Loughlin)

"There's a real hunger for spaces that are affirming of the LGBT Catholic community, that celebrate the contributions that we make to the church, that provide space for LGBT Catholics to live out their faith," said O'Loughlin, who is gay. "And I thought if I can help build that up even more, that would be a good contribution to make."

O'Loughlin said he appreciates Martin and Outreach's approach, which he says highlights what is already occurring in the Catholic Church, "rather than calling for change one way or the other."

"It's encountering people where they are, telling their stories, allowing them space to talk about their own experiences," he said. "I see it as almost like what Pope Francis does, in acknowledging the reality of how people develop their faith today, which doesn't always perfectly align with church teaching in any number of areas."

It is a time of cautious hope for many LGBTQ Catholics, as Francis has shifted how the church speaks about and treats those on the margins due to their sexual orientation and gender identity. His boldest moves arguably came last year, when he approved doctrinal documents that allow, in certain instances, trans people to serve as godparents and be baptized, and gay couples to receive a blessing.

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O'Loughlin recounted how during a talk a few weeks ago at a Massachusetts parish someone asked what he thought the future held for LGBTQ issues in the church.

"I don't know of course, but I said I thought forming communities was important because these are spaces where the LGBT community can celebrate things like the recent document about blessing same-sex couples," he said.

And perhaps even more importantly, they can come together if there are setbacks, "if there is a pope in the future who begins to crack down on the LGBT community," said O'Loughlin.

"I think it's a moment where there is an energy, there's room for dialogue and creativity, but that probably won't always be the case," he added. "We should take advantage of that now, so there's that support in place for when there are more challenges."