Vatican
Vatican News



Pope Francis smiles and waves to visitors after reciting the Angelus prayer, wrapping up the first World Children's Day in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican May 26. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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DignityUSA, a national organization advocating for LGBTQ Catholics, has denounced Pope Francis' recent reported use of an Italian slur when discussing the admission of gay men to priestly seminaries as "shocking and hurtful."

"We are glad that Pope Francis has apologized for using such a demeaning term," said Marianne Duddy-Burke, the group's executive director, in a May 28 statement. "We know that this was shocking and hurtful to many, especially to the innumerable gay priests who have served God’s people faithfully and well. We stand with them, and with the people who have benefited from their ministry. The truth is that the Church simply could not function without those countless gay priests, bishops and maybe even popes who currently serve and have served over the centuries."

In an interview with NCR, Duddy-Burke said that "incidents like this are also very traumatizing, especially to people who have watched the pope and have hope due to his pastoral approach, even in things like his meeting with me in October 2023. They start to feel they may be able to feel real welcome and value in our church, and then those hopes are dashed when something like this happens."



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

Earlier on May 28, the Vatican issued an apology for the pope's reported use of an anti-gay slur during a recent closed-door meeting with Italian bishops. The 87-year-old pontiff reportedly made the controversial remark while discussing the suitability of gay men for priestly training.

The Vatican statement did not directly confirm whether the pope used the term, but said: "The pope never intended to offend or express himself in homophobic terms, and he extends his apologies to those who felt offended by the use of a term, as reported by others."

In the May 20 meeting, Francis reportedly advised the Italian bishops about permitting gay men to enter seminaries. According to reports from reputable Italian

newspapers such as Corriere della Sera and La Repubblica, the pope used the Italian word "*frociaggine*," which translates to "faggotry" or "faggotness," in his remarks.

The comments came during a discussion on proposed amendments to guidelines for seminary candidates. Francis, a native of Argentina who speaks Italian as a second language, may not have realized the offensive nature of his words, Corriere della Sera speculated.

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Reporting on the pope's supposed comments has reignited debate over the church's stance on LGBTQ+ issues. A 2005 ruling from the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education prohibits the ordination of men who are actively gay or have "deep-seated" homosexual tendencies, a position reaffirmed by Pope Francis in 2016. In 2018, he reportedly reiterated to Italian bishops the need to exclude gay candidates from the priesthood, in a similar closed-door meeting with the prelates.

"Unfortunately, even if intended as a joke, the pope's comment reveals the depth of anti-gay bias and institutional discrimination that still exist in our church," said Duddy-Burke.

"It is wrong to demean any group of people, including those of us who are LGBTQIA+," she said. "And it is wrong to continue to act as if God calls only straight, cisgender men to service in the church and the world."



Francis DeBernardo (file photo)

New Ways Ministry, another prominent Catholic LGBTQ advocacy group, also issued a statement in response to the pope's reported comments. Francis DeBernardo, the group's executive director, expressed appreciation for the pope's apology, saying it is a significant step toward more respectful dialogue within the church.

"His apology is a model for all Catholic leaders who continue to use language and ideas that offend LGBTQ+ people, even unknowingly," said DeBernardo. The Vatican's apology was interpreted by New Ways as an acknowledgment that the use of the slur was inadvertent.

New Ways also expressed disappointment over the pope's lack of specificity regarding his stance on gay men in the priesthood. DeBernardo said Francis should clarify his comments to prevent misinterpretations that could lead to a "blanket ban" on gay men entering seminaries.

He quoted the pope's famous 2013 remark — "Who am I to judge?" — urging Francis to offer a clearer and more compassionate statement that recognizes the faithful service of many gay priests.

"We hope this incident will encourage him to learn more about the language he uses and be more careful because misuse can be dangerously harmful," said DeBernardo.