Vatican

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Participants in Rome's 2024 LGBTQ Pride parade actively protest Pope Francis' recent gay slurs on June 15. (NCR photo/Christopher White)



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Rome — June 16, 2024

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Pope Francis was unintentionally the star of Rome's 2024 Pride parade, where more than one million people took to the streets of the Eternal City on June 15, with scores of marchers holding signs seeking to both protest and reclaim a word the pope has reportedly used twice in the last month that sent shockwaves through the LGBTQ community.

"There is too much faggotry in this pride," read one sign in Italian. The poster was being carried by a man dressed in a white cassock, like that of the pope, except he was also draped in a pride flag and wearing a rainbow crucifix.

As the rainbow-clad pope protester arrived into Rome's Piazza della Repubblica where the parade was about to start, onlookers quickly ran up to him to pose for photos.

"I can't believe he said *that* word," said one.

"I think he knows what it means," he responded. "It's not the case he did not know."

And to some respect, that's been the debate that's reverberated from the halls of the Vatican throughout the rest of the world since it was first reported that the pope used the Italian slur *frociaggine* ("faggotry" or "faggotness") in a closed door meeting with Italian bishops on May 20 during a discussion about gay men in the seminary.


C'È TROPPA
FROCIAGGINE
IN QUESTO
PRIDE!
#UMAN

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The backlash was swift — but so was the Vatican's response, when less than 24 hours later, the usually stolid Vatican press office rushed to clarify that "the pope never intended to offend or express himself in homophobic terms" and offered an apology.

The statement said that the pope believes there is "room for everyone" in the Catholic Church and a few days later, Italian media reported that Francis had written to an openly gay man who desired to join the seminary and telling him to "keep going."

But just as the firestorm was beginning to settle, reports emerged that the pope had used the term a second time in another closed door session with priests, warning of various ideologies in the church, and in particular, that within the Vatican, "there is an air of faggotry."

And on the streets of Rome's Pride parade, marchers reveled in humorously pointing out the hypocrisy of an organization that forbids gay relationships and where even the pope seems to acknowledge that the priesthood includes many gay men.

"You are so right there is really faggotry all over the place, especially in the toilets and between the sheets of the Vatican," read one pointed sign.



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"Today Rome is a river of faggotry, not only in its seminaries," read another of the many Francis-*frociaggine* themed posters.

Just days before Rome's Pride parade, U.S. Jesuit Fr. James Martin, who founded the Catholic LGBTQ "Outreach" ministry, met Francis and posted on social media that "the Holy Father said he has known many good, holy and celibate seminarians and priests with homosexual tendencies."

"Once again, he confirmed my ministry with LGBTQ people and showed his openness and love for the LGBTQ community," Martin wrote on June 12.

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Whether that sentiment was reciprocated by marchers attending Rome's 30th anniversary Pride parade — in a city where there's always been a tense relationship between the church and the LGBTQ community and at an event where religion often finds itself in the crosshairs — depended on the person.

"Pope Francis is homophobic," said one man who declined to give his name. Another onlooker held a sign with a smiling Francis that simply read "I bless this faggot."

But as the parade made its way around the papal basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore — a church Francis has visited over 100 times since becoming pope and where he recently announced he intends to be buried — two parade goers held a large cutout of Francis wearing a rainbow boa and a sign that said "in our parish, you are welcome."

"I think he was caught in a bad moment," said Daniele Lacitgnola. "And I think he should care more about what he said."

He then gestured around to the vibrant crowd that had taken to the streets to show their defiance and smiled: "That's why I'm inviting him to our church."

A version of this story appeared in the **July 5-18, 2024** print issue under the headline: Pope Francis: The unintentional star of Rome's 2024 LGBTQ Pride parade.