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Catholic LGBTQ+ Ministry Welcomes Change in Policy on Gay Priests in Italy

Statement of Francis DeBernardo, Executive Director, New Ways Ministry

MOUNT RAINIER, Maryland—Responding to the [news](#) that the Italian Bishops Conference will no longer exclude gay men from entering the seminary based on their identity alone, Francis DeBernardo, Executive Director of New Ways Ministry, offered the following comments:

“This development is a big step forward. It clarifies previous ambiguous statements about gay seminary candidates, which viewed them with suspicion. This ambiguity caused lots of fear and discrimination in the church, way beyond the arena of seminary admissions.

“This new clarification treats gay candidates in the same way that heterosexual candidates are treated. That type of equal treatment is what the Church should be aiming for in regards to all LGBTQ+ issues.

“This new guidance clarifies two previous statements from the Vatican in 2005 and [2016](#). The 2016 statement, signed by Pope Francis, was basically a reiteration of the 2005 statement, signed by Pope Benedict XVI. In fact, the latter statement directly quoted from the earlier one:

‘The Church, while profoundly respecting the persons in question, cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practise homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called ‘gay culture’. Such persons, in fact, find themselves in a situation that gravely hinders them from relating correctly to men and women.’

“These two previous statements created a climate of fear among gay priests and seminarians for two decades. This exclusion also helped to fuel unsubstantiated claims that gay priests were responsible for the clergy sex abuse crisis. A number of gay priests shared their fears and their life journeys in a 2019 [New York Times article](#).”

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New Ways Ministry is a 48-year-old national Catholic ministry of justice and reconciliation for LGBTQ+ people and the church. For more information visit: www.NewWaysMinistry.org.