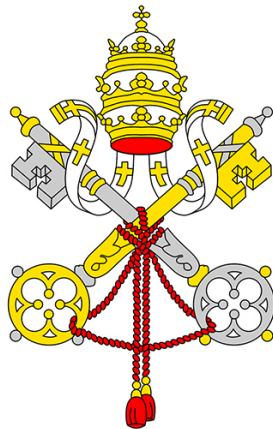


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The Vatican City flag, left, and a pride flag. (Courtesy Wikimedia/Creative Commons)

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Vatican City — January 13, 2025

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A provisional document published by the Italian Bishops' Conference on Friday (Jan. 10) and approved by the Vatican cautiously opens the door for the ordination of openly gay men to the priesthood, while maintaining the normal requirement of

chastity.

"In the formative process, when referring to homosexual tendencies, it's also appropriate not to reduce discernment only to this aspect, but, as for every candidate, to grasp its meaning in the global framework of the young person's personality," the document reads, adding that the goal is for the candidate to know himself and find harmony between his human and priestly vocation.

The Vatican department for clergy approved the document, which will be valid for three years. The document was signed by the head of the Italian bishops, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, who is considered a close collaborator to Pope Francis.

The objective of the preparation for a candidate who is seeking to become a priest when it comes to his sexuality, the document states, "is the ability to accept as a gift, to freely choose and to live chastity in celibacy in a responsible way."

The document, titled "The Formation of Presbyters in Italian Churches. Guidelines and Rules for Seminaries," was approved by the Italian bishops who met for their general assembly Nov. 13-16 in Assisi. The episcopacy in Italy, where vocations are at an all-time low, has been pushing the envelope in terms of making the Catholic Church more palatable to modern concerns by suggesting a greater role for women in the formation of priests, a commitment to combating sexual abuse and the acceptance of gay men to the priesthood.

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According to the 2005 Vatican instruction by the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education, "while the church deeply respects the people in question, it cannot admit to the seminary or to Holy Orders those who practice homosexuality, have deeply rooted homosexual tendencies or support the so-called gay culture."

The Italian bishops' document quotes directly from the Vatican instruction but also suggests that other aspects be taken into account when considering the acceptance of gay candidates to the priesthood. While being openly gay no longer automatically bars a candidate from becoming a priest, such candidates are still held to the same standard of chastity as heterosexual priests are.

In a statement published on Friday, New Ways Ministry, an advocacy group for LGBTQIA Catholics in the U.S., welcomed the document as "a big step forward" in combating discrimination in the church.

"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," the statement read.

The possibility of admitting gay men to the priesthood caused a stir in May of last year, when [Pope Francis used an anti-gay slur to express his skepticism](#) on the matter in a closed-door meeting with Italian bishops. The Vatican issued an apology, stating that the pope "never meant to offend or express himself with homophobic terms," but Francis has been ambivalent in the past about gay priests and seminarians.

The pope has strongly criticized the "gay lobby" as a center of power in the Vatican and voiced doubts about gay priests' adherence to a celibate lifestyle, but he also [encouraged a young gay seminarian](#) who asked for his advice in his priestly discernment last June.