

Pope Francis apologizes for using homophobic slurs while saying 'no' to gay priests

by [Claire Giangravé](#)

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Pope Francis attends an annual gathering of pro-family organizations at the Auditorium della Conciliazione in Rome on May 10. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

During a closed-door meeting with 200 Italian bishops last week, Pope Francis allegedly used derogatory terms to describe gay people during debates about whether the Italian church should allow gay men to enter the seminary.

According to local reports, the Argentine pope said “there is already enough faggotry” in Catholic seminaries, in his speech to prelates on May 20. The pope used the Italian term “frocìaggine,” a rarely used slur to describe flamboyant gay attitudes. Francis allegedly also used other disparaging words to describe gays.

“The pope never meant to offend or express himself with homophobic terms, and he issues his most sincere apologies to all those who felt offended by the use of a term reported by others,” read a statement by Vatican spokesperson Matteo Bruni on Tuesday.

The Vatican did not deny that the pope used those terms and offered no clarification on who were the “others” who reported the pope’s words.

The statement clarified that the pope is aware of the news reports regarding his private meeting with the Italian bishops and that Francis wants to reiterate his belief that “in the church there is place for everyone, for everyone! No one is useless, no one is superfluous, there is space for everyone. Just the way we are, everyone.”

The Italian bishops, who were convened for the national assembly meeting in Rome, are considering relaxing the ban on admitting gay men to the seminary.

Individuals who have “deeply rooted homosexual tendencies” are not allowed to enter the seminary, according to a 2005 Vatican instruction. Inspired by the pope’s opening toward LGBTQ faithful, Italian bishops are discussing the possibility of removing the ban.

During the meeting, which lasted an hour and a half, the pope allegedly stated that the church should continue to bar entry to the priesthood to gay men. After his famous words “who am I to judge?” in answering a question on gay priests, Pope Francis’s new comments struck many faithful as contradictory.

“When Pope Francis’ private conversations are made public, it’s always difficult to understand the full meaning of what he is saying,” said Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry, a Catholic ministry to LGBTQ faithful in the United States, in a message on Tuesday.

“His apology is a model for all Catholic leaders who continue to use language and ideas that offend LGBTQ+ people,” he added.

“It is disappointing, however, that the pope did not clarify more specifically what he meant by banning gay men from the priesthood. Without a clarification, it would seem that his words intend a blanket ban on all gay men,” DeBernardo said.

DeBernardo questioned whether the pope was aware of how offensive his words were and whether Francis was referring to men who are in gay sexual relationships

when addressing the priesthood.

“These possible explanations, however, do not excuse the pope’s comments,” he added. “Pope Francis has not always been clear in his remarks about LGBTQ+ people. We hope this incident will encourage him to learn more about the language he uses, and about how misuse can be dangerously harmful.”

The pope has seemed to offer an unprecedented opening toward LGBTQ faithful, meeting with gay dignitaries and advocates at the Vatican, supporting the pastoral outreach to the LGBTQ community of Jesuit priest James Martin, and helping trans communities.

But the pope’s words of welcoming to LGBTQ faithful have not led to any change to the church’s teachings on homosexuality, including that gay acts are a sin. Last year, the Vatican’s Department for the Doctrine of the Faith cautiously allowed priests to bless same-sex couples, but the pope took a step back on the historic decision by stating that gay unions cannot be blessed because they are contrary to natural law in [an interview with 60 Minutes](#) that aired May 20.

In the same interview, Francis said that gay people can be blessed as individuals and that “everyone” is welcome in the church.

The long speech to Italian bishops was delivered in Italian, which isn’t the pope’s native language, but this isn’t the first time Francis has used colorful language to get his message across. While speaking to sex abuse victims in Dublin in 2018, the pope said that priests who covered up abuse are “shit” and he has accused media outlets of “coprophilia,” meaning that they are aroused by excrement.

The pope’s comments come shortly before Rome’s gay pride parade, which is set to take place on June 15. —Religion News Service