



June 25, 2015

His Holiness, Pope Francis  
Apostolic Palace  
00120 Vatican City

Dear Pope Francis,

Like millions of others, we are eagerly anticipating your Pastoral Visit to the United States. Some of us will be among the crowds that will greet you in person. All of us will be following your travels and praying that this visit helps bring better unity to the Body of Christ.

We are writing to request that you meet with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Catholics and their family members during your visit. Some of us write as Catholics, or as leaders of Catholic organizations, and others on behalf of the many Catholics among our constituents.

We know that your schedule is very busy, but this is a compelling pastoral need, and would promote great healing and reconciliation in our Church and society. Many LGBT people and family members have experienced a resurgence of hope for full acceptance in our Church as a result of your words and reports of personal meetings with LGBT people. We see your visit to the U.S. as an opportunity for you to hear from us how central our faith is to our lives, and to work together towards creating a Church where all families know that we are truly loved and welcomed.

Currently, our Church's teaching and pastoral practices surrounding LGBT people are causing an enormous pastoral crisis, as well as upholding systemic, institutionalized discrimination against LGBT people and our families. In the U.S. and around the world, we are experiencing alienation from the Church, higher rates of poverty and violence, and discrimination in employment, housing, educational opportunities, and access to health care.

LGBT youth are particularly vulnerable, with nearly half of the LGBT young people in the U.S. considered to be at-risk. Lacking support at home, at school, or from faith communities, LGBT youth suffer bullying, experience depression, self-mutilate, attempt suicide, use drugs, become homeless or enter foster care at rates far higher than non-LGBT youth. This is a crisis that the church can help to address through effective pastoral care and programs that provides love and support for these youth.

In the U.S. we have seen strong support of LGBT issues among all Catholics, including rapidly rising support among Latinos as greater numbers of Latino LGBT people come out. Latino Catholics have felt new support, which is reverberating into their large circles of families and friends. According to the [Public Religion Research Institute](#), "about six in ten white (61 percent), Hispanic (60 percent), and other non-white Catholics (60 percent) support allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally." At

times, these Catholic families feel unwelcome in our Church, as they fear or experience condemnation of themselves or their loved ones. This is something that pains us all.

All of these concerns are important to us as Catholics, and we know they are important to you. We ask that you meet with representatives of the LGBT Catholic community and our family members to hear our stories of perseverance, hope, and struggle. We believe your personal attention to our concerns could help hasten greater justice, in the U.S. and across the globe.

We are happy to meet at a time most convenient to you. Please contact us at [Coordinator@equallyblessed.org](mailto:Coordinator@equallyblessed.org) or 617-669-7810 so that we can work out the logistics.

Be assured of our prayers for your ongoing leadership and service.

In hope,

Marianne Duddy-Burke  
Executive Director, DignityUSA

Sarah Kate Ellis  
President and CEO, GLAAD



### **Endorsing Organizations and Individuals**

8<sup>th</sup> Day Center for Justice

Catholics for Choice

Chicago Women-Church

Corpus USA

A Critical Mass: Women Celebrating Eucharist

Familia es Familia

Human Rights Campaign

Latino Equality Alliance (LEA)

Latino GLBT History Project

National Council of La Raza

National Hispanic Media Coalition

Roman Catholic Womanpriests USA (RCWP-USA)

Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference

Jim FitzGerald  
Executive Director, Call to Action

Charlie Davis  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion

Justin Tanis  
Managing Director, Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry

Deb Word  
President, Fortunate Families

Dr. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza  
Krister Stendahl Professor of Divinity, Harvard University

Sr. Jeannine Gramick  
Executive Coordinator, National Coalition of American Nuns

Francis DeBernardo  
Executive Director, New Ways Ministry

David Vásquez-Levy  
President, Pacific School of Religion

Brian Cahill  
Former Executive Director, San Francisco Catholic Charities

Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu  
Co-Directors, WATER Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual

Kate McElwee and Erin Saiz Hanna,  
Co-Executive Directors, Women's Ordination Conference (WOC)

Susanne Cassidy  
Philadelphia, PA

Mary Ellen Chown  
Oakville, ON, Canada

Erma M. Durkin  
Glen Arm, MD

Darlene Noesen  
Chicago, IL

Dr. Miguel de la Torre  
Iliff School of Theology in Denver, CO