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New Ways Ministry Praises Three of Pope Francis' Cardinal Choices

October 25, 2020 / [2 Comments](#) / in [Hierarchy](#), [Pope Francis](#) / by [Francis DeBernardo](#), [Editor](#)



The following is a statement from Francis DeBernardo, New Ways Ministry's Executive Director, in response to Pope Francis naming 13 new cardinals to be created in a November 28, 2020

consistory.

Pope Francis has included a U.S. archbishop who has made several strong, positive statements about LGBTQ people in the group of 13 church leaders named cardinals today. A bishop from the island nation of Malta, who also has an LGBTQ-positive record was also named, as well as a bishop from Albano, Italy.

Archbishop Wilton Gregory, who heads the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., is one of the few members of the U.S. Catholic hierarchy who is willing to offer affirming messages to the LGBTQ community. He is the first Black bishop from the U.S. to be named a cardinal, has spoken frequently on racial justice, and has connected the 1960s civil rights movement to the LGBTQ equality movement.

Bishop Mario Grech, who serves at the Vatican as secretary general of the Synod of Bishops office, is formerly the leader of the Diocese of Gozo, Malta. Grech's statements in support of LGBTQ people have made him strongly accepted by the gay community in Malta, a very Catholic nation and also considered the nation with the strongest LGBTQ civil protections in the world.

Bishop Marcello Semeraro, who was just recently appointed to lead the Vatican's Congregation for Causes of Saints, has

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shown that he is open to discussing LGBTQ issues. While his record is not as long as the other two men, it still points in a positive direction.

(See highlights from the three leaders' records on LGBTQ issues below.)

Coming just days after Pope Francis made headlines for statements supporting same-gender civil unions, the inclusion of these three leaders to the College of Cardinals, the church body which will elect the next pope, continues the pontiff's [long record \[https://www.newwaysministry.org/resources/pope-francis-lgbt-issues/\]](https://www.newwaysministry.org/resources/pope-francis-lgbt-issues/) of LGBTQ-positive statements and actions.

In papacies gone by, statements about LGBTQ issues like these three prelates have made would have been cause for discipline, not promotion.

These prelates have been willing to discuss LGBTQ issues in supportive ways, something that, unfortunately, is a rarity among the church's leaders. Even more importantly, they are willing to be listeners and have demonstrated that they are able to develop their thinking on these issues, moving away from ideas and attitudes that are cemented in stereotypes, myths, and fear.

Even with the immense amount of criticism that Pope Francis has received from conservative hierarchs, the pontiff shows no indication of shying away from making decisions that can have positive ramifications for LGBTQ people. Since naming cardinals also affects who the next pontiff will be, the pope also shows that he is planning for the future of the church to continue in this affirming posture on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

In his previous appointments of cardinals, Pope Francis had already named a number of LGBTQ-friendly leaders: Archbishops Blase Cupich, Joseph Tobin, Kevin Farrell, Jozef De Kesel, Vincent Nichols, Matteo Zuppi, Jean-Claude Hollerich, José Tolentino Medonca, John Atcherly Dew, Dominique Mamberti, and Father Michael Czerny, SJ.

New Ways Ministry welcomes these three new cardinals, and we hope and pray that they will continue their prophetic ministry and that other church leaders will follow their examples.

Highlights from Cardinal-elect Wilton Gregory's record on LGBTQ issues

As archbishop of Washington, Gregory's most noted LGBTQ-friendly statement came when at a public meeting, he was asked by a transgender Catholic: "What place do I as a confirmed transgender Catholic and what place do my queer friends have here in this archdiocese?"



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The archbishop [replied](https://www.newwaysministry.org/2019/08/30/u-s-archbishop-tells-transgender-catholic-you-belong-to-the-heart-of-this-church/)
[\[https://www.newwaysministry.org/2019/08/30/u-s-archbishop-tells-transgender-catholic-you-belong-to-the-heart-of-this-church/\]](https://www.newwaysministry.org/2019/08/30/u-s-archbishop-tells-transgender-catholic-you-belong-to-the-heart-of-this-church/) .:

“You belong to the heart of this church. There is nothing that you may do, may say, that will rip you from the heart of this church. There is a lot that has been said to you, about you, behind your back that is painful and is sinful. I mentioned my conversation with Fortunate Families. We have to find a way to talk to one another, and to talk to one another not just from one perspective, but to talk and to listen to one another. I think that’s the way that Jesus ministered. He engaged people, he took them where they were at, and he invited them to go deeper, closer to God. If you’re asking me where do you fit, you fit in the family.”

Gregory previously served as Archbishop of Atlanta, where his LGBTQ record began with allowing the cathedral in Atlanta to host group for the families of LGBTQ people; [acknowledging](https://www.newwaysministry.org/2014/10/24/archbishop-wilton-gregory-other-prelates-churchs-welcome-to-lgbt-people-needs-improvement/)
[\[https://www.newwaysministry.org/2014/10/24/archbishop-wilton-gregory-other-prelates-churchs-welcome-to-lgbt-people-needs-improvement/\]](https://www.newwaysministry.org/2014/10/24/archbishop-wilton-gregory-other-prelates-churchs-welcome-to-lgbt-people-needs-improvement/) that the Church needed to improve its pastoral care for LGBTQ persons; and [defending](https://www.newwaysministry.org/2018/09/27/archbishop-stands-by-fr-james-martin-and-lgbt-friendly-pastor-against-conservative-protestors/)
[\[https://www.newwaysministry.org/2018/09/27/archbishop-stands-by-fr-james-martin-and-lgbt-friendly-pastor-against-conservative-protestors/\]](https://www.newwaysministry.org/2018/09/27/archbishop-stands-by-fr-james-martin-and-lgbt-friendly-pastor-against-conservative-protestors/) both Fr. James Martin, S.J., and Msgr. Henry Gracz, both LGBTQ-affirming priests, against right-wing attacks.

In 2014, he appointed a deacon to pastoral ministry with the LGBTQ community in the Atlanta archdiocese. In announcing the appointment, Gregory [acknowledged](https://www.newwaysministry.org/2014/10/24/archbishop-wilton-gregory-other-prelates-churchs-welcome-to-lgbt-people-needs-improvement/)
[\[https://www.newwaysministry.org/2014/10/24/archbishop-wilton-gregory-other-prelates-churchs-welcome-to-lgbt-people-needs-improvement/\]](https://www.newwaysministry.org/2014/10/24/archbishop-wilton-gregory-other-prelates-churchs-welcome-to-lgbt-people-needs-improvement/) the church has not always treated this community respectfully:

“... [T]he Church must welcome all of her sons and daughters—no matter what their sexual orientation or life situation might be—and that we have not always done so with a spirit of compassion and understanding. I spoke of the distinction that our Church makes between orientation and behavior, which admittedly needs reexamination and development.

“We are all called to conversion—not just some members of the Church.”

In a [talk on new forms of discrimination](https://www.newwaysministry.org/2018/05/11/quote-to-note-archbishop-condemns-discrimination-based-on-race-gender-and-orientation/)
[\[https://www.newwaysministry.org/2018/05/11/quote-to-note-archbishop-condemns-discrimination-based-on-race-gender-and-orientation/\]](https://www.newwaysministry.org/2018/05/11/quote-to-note-archbishop-condemns-discrimination-based-on-race-gender-and-orientation/) which Gregory gave at a 2018 conference of

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2. Please refrain from name-calling or other personal attacks. Challenge people's ideas and arguments instead of insulting them.
3. Please use only civil language; no profanities.

priests, he decried “the brutality that an individual’s sexual orientation often fosters and justifies.”

After the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court marriage equality decision, Gregory’s [statement](https://www.newwaysministry.org/2015/06/29/catholics-continue-to-react-to-supreme-court-marriage-equality-ruling/) [https://www.newwaysministry.org/2015/06/29/catholics-continue-to-react-to-supreme-court-marriage-equality-ruling/] did not approve the decision, but he emphasized:

“This judgment. . . does not absolve either those who may approve or disapprove of this decision from the obligations of civility toward one another. Neither is it a license for more venomous language or vile behavior against those whose opinions continue to differ from our own. It is a decision that confers a civil entitlement to some people who could not claim it before. . . .

“The decision has offered all of us an opportunity to continue the vitally important dialogue of human encounter, especially between those of diametrically differing opinions regarding its outcome.”

In 2016, Gregory and the bishop of Savannah issued a statement [supporting Georgia governor’s decision to veto](https://www.newwaysministry.org/2016/03/31/two-catholic-governors-and-two-bishops-oppose-lgbt-discrimination/) [https://www.newwaysministry.org/2016/03/31/two-catholic-governors-and-two-bishops-oppose-lgbt-discrimination/] a religious freedom bill which many saw as a license to discriminate against LGBTQ people. The statement said we “do not support any implementation of [Religious Freedom Restoration Act] in a way that will discriminate against any individual” because each person’s dignity is “the basis for religious liberty.”

Highlights from Cardinal-elect Mario Grech’s record on LGBTQ issues

Grech gave a [speech](https://church.mt/speech-by-bishop-mario-grech-during-the-iii-extraordinary-general-assembly-of-the-synod-of-bishops/) [https://church.mt/speech-by-bishop-mario-grech-during-the-iii-extraordinary-general-assembly-of-the-synod-of-bishops/] at the Vatican’s 2014 Synod on the Family, where he called on church leaders to use more sensitive language about gay and lesbian people:

“A good point of departure would be in our choice of language – may it be the language of a Church that is both merciful and brings healing. I must confess to facing the urgency of this need while listening to families of homosexuals as well as to the same persons having such an orientation and who feel wounded by the language directed towards them in certain texts, for instance in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997 edition, §2358); these persons consequently struggle both with maintaining their faith alive as well as cultivating their sense of filial belonging to the Church.”

4. We will not approve any comments that we deem to be pastorally or personally harmful to our readers.
5. We will not approve any comments that tell people to leave the Catholic Church. Blanket calls for all LGBTQ people and allies to leave the church—either because they are hypocritical to remain or because they are not orthodox enough to be included or for some other reason—do not fit our definition of discussion. We respect individuals’ decisions to leave the Church, so telling their stories about those decisions is permissible.

Even more remarkable than the words that he spoke is the fact that before the synod, Grech took time to listen [<https://www.newwaysministry.org/2014/10/10/synod-malta-bishops-talk-was-influenced-by-listening-to-parents-of-lgbt-people/>]. to parents' of LGBTQ people so that he could better understand the reality of their lives. Very few bishops have actually taken time to listen to either LGBTQ individuals or their families. At the time [<https://www.newwaysministry.org/2014/10/22/pope-francis-on-synod-god-is-not-afraid-of-new-things/>], it was reported that Pope Francis told Grech that he approved of his talk.

Grech is one of a growing number of Catholic leaders who have said positive things about civil unions and same-gender couples [<https://www.newwaysministry.org/church-leaders-support/>]. even *before* the pope's recent statements. When Grech was asked in a 2015 interview [<https://www.newwaysministry.org/2015/12/09/bishop-hopes-year-of-mercy-will-start-a-new-era-for-the-church/>], if same-gender couples in a civil unions should be welcomed by the church, Grech said:

“Of course. They are part of God’s people, and like everybody else they are going through a journey and the Church needs to support them in revealing God’s hidden face. We cannot define such a journey in stages and put up barriers, as the road is wide open to those truly seeking to follow God’s footsteps, regardless of their sexual orientation.”

Grech added that “there can be different forms of relationship” beyond marriage.

Cardinal-elect Marcello Semeraro’s record on LGBTQ issues

In 2018, Semeraro addressed [<https://www.newwaysministry.org/2018/10/12/papal-advisor-calls-for-church-to-welcome-lgbt-christians-first-as-baptized-christians/>]. the meeting of Italy’s National Forum on LGBT Christians. His message emphasized inclusion, welcome, and a shared equality because of baptism. In part, he said:

“You are Christian groups and this means a title of fraternity. ‘Christian is my name’, wrote Paciano of Barcelona in the fourth century: this allows all Christians to call each other by name. This is the title for which I recognize you as siblings. It is the truth of all time, it is the truth of Baptism that has impressed in us a seal of ancestry and of fraternity (baptismal character) that nothing, not even sin, will ever succeed in destroying.”

—Francis DeBernardo, *New Ways Ministry*, October 25, 2020