Blog



A protester holds a sign ahead of a July 31 march for voting rights in Austin, Texas. (CNS/Reuters/Callaghan O'Hare)



by Dan Stockman

View Author Profile
dstockman@ncronline.org

Join the Conversation

September 20, 2021

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Editor's note: *Global Sisters Report's Monday Starter is a weekly feature from GSR staff writers that rounds up news from or about women religious that you may otherwise have missed.*



Catholic sisters are among those working for passage of the Freedom to Vote Act, a package of federal voting reforms introduced Sept. 14 meant to protect voters' rights and roll back state attempts to restrict or suppress voting.

Sr. Quincy Howard, coordinating director of advocacy, outreach and campaigns for the Faithful Democracy coalition and a government relations advocate at Network, a Catholic social justice lobby, said months of efforts by the faith community is paying off.

"This bill represents a coming together to find a path forward for badly needed reforms. Leaders from an array of faith traditions applaud today's introduction of the Freedom to Vote Act," Howard, a Dominican Sister of Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, said in a Sept. 14 press release. "While Democrats are working to win support from their colleagues across the aisle, passage of this legislation cannot wait. If Republicans refuse to support these needed reforms, then Senate leadership must find a way to pass this legislation. There is no time to waste and our democracy is too important."

Advertisement

Stephen Schneck, executive director of Franciscan Action Network, said voting restrictions are aimed at the very voters Christians are most called to serve.

"The Gospels say we are measured by what we have done for those in poverty, the discriminated against, the vulnerable, those whom society has made powerless, excluded, and disenfranchised," Schneck said in a Sept. 14 written statement. "Yet, today that Gospel message is threatened by state laws seeking in subtle and not so subtle ways to deter the impoverished and marginalized from voting. Federal

legislation is needed to address these shameful challenges."



NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER SEPTEMBER 17-30, 2021

PAID ADVERTISEMENT 11

A HOME FOR ALL

A *Catholic* Call for LGBTQ Non-Discrimination

The following are excerpts of a 2,000-word theological statement produced by New Ways Ministry. The entire text can be found at www.NewWaysMinistry.org/homeforall.

Introduction

The relationship between the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church and the community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) persons has long been fraught with tensions, negative emotions, and confusion. Equally alarming is that a vocal section of our church leaders too often does not fully consider Catholicism's most fundamental teachings and values when taking positions on LGBTQ social policy initiatives.

Because LGBTQ people suffer from unjust discrimination due to structural inequalities in law and social institutions, our Catholic faith compels us to speak out in support of the principle of non-discrimination. As Catholic theologians, scholars, church leaders, writers, and ministers, we affirm that Catholic teaching presents a positive case for ending discrimination against LGBTQ people. We affirm the Second Vatican Council's demand that "any kind of social or cultural discrimination ... must be curbed and eradicated" (Gaudium et Spes, 29).

Signs of the Times: Discrimination

Despite certain legal and social advances in recent years, LGBTQ people in the United States remain victims of significant discrimination. A recent report shows that more than one-third of LGBTQ people have faced some form of discrimination, and the rate is notably higher if one is transgender or a person of color. Discrimination manifests itself in healthcare, housing, employment, public accommodations, adoption and foster care, interactions with police, access to credit, and education. Such discrimination is often compounded by gender, race, religion, class, or other factors. Scripture strongly affirms that God hears and responds to the cry of the poor and suffering. Society's failure to protect LGBTQ people has left them crying out for justice.

Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching, in church documents from the late 19th century to the present day, provides a clear basis to support non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church demands. Catholic Social Teaching is based on decades of theological reflection and has developed with the following components at its core:

- Because all human beings are endowed with human dignity and equal to one another, no individuals or groups should be denied the civil rights enjoyed by others in society.
- Justice in society requires a preferential concern for any individuals or groups who are poor, vulnerable, or marginalized.
- Society must always value the common good, which includes protecting each person's ability to reach their full human potential.

Which Comes First: Justice or Sex?

Should the church's sexual ethics tradition or its social justice tradition be the primary lens with which to examine LGBTQ-equality initiatives? We believe it is imperative for Catholics and their leaders to rely on the social justice tradition. This concept is strongly supported by Catholic reasoning:

- Both social ethics and sexual ethics are fundamentally concerned with how to live well and pursue Christian perfection. Social justice, however, is necessarily prior to creating the appropriate conditions whereby people can choose the good when it comes to sexual ethics.
- The message of Scripture shows that Jesus was much more concerned with social arrangements than with sexuality.
- In Catholic thinking, public law is not an enforcement mechanism for the totality of personal morality.
- The Catholic ethical tradition rejects the idea that a just end can be obtained through unjust means. Discrimination against LGBTQ people cannot be used as a means to oppose ideas or behavior to which a religious body may object.

Signs of the Times: The Right Moment

Now is the time to act for non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people. Both the church's and society's understandings of LGBTQ people have changed in the following important ways. First, scientific evidence continues to prove that sexual orientation and gender identity are fundamental characteristics of an individual and are normal in the human experience, not deviations from it. Second, as more LGBTQ people are open about their orientation and/or identity, we witness more and more the healthy, holy, and wholesome ways that God's revelation is manifest in all people, including LGBTQ people. Third, among the U.S. laity in our Catholic Church, more welcoming and affirming attitudes toward LGBTQ people continue to expand.

Moreover, our church has placed a renewed emphasis on its social teaching as a constitutive aspect of its evangelical mission. The Catholic Church today enlivened by the dangerous memories of those on the underside of history proclaims the Reign of God especially when it proclaims social justice.

Conclusion

Our strong endorsement of non-discrimination towards LGBTQ people comes from careful reflection on scripture, our church's tradition and teachings, our academic studies, and our experience of the lives of LGBTQ people. We hope you will join in the mission to make both our church and our world a home for all.

Key Endorsers In institutional affiliations for identification purposes only

A Home for All: The first page of a four-page advertisement in the Sept. 17 print edition of the National Catholic Reporter that featured more than 2,000 signatories to New Ways Ministry's "A Home for All" statement (GSR screenshot)

A show of support for the LGBTQ community

Many Catholics are also speaking out in support for measures to protect LGBTQ people from discrimination.

"A Home for All: A Catholic Call for LGBTQ Non-Discrimination" was published as a four-page advertisement in the Sept. 17 print edition of the National Catholic Reporter and included more than 2,000 signatories, including 115 Catholic organizations. At least 48 of those were congregations of women religious. Among the individual signatories were St. Joseph Sr. Helen Prejean, Social Service Sr. Simone Campbell, Mercy Sr. Margaret Farley, and St. Joseph Sr. Elizabeth Johnson.

A number of vocal church leaders too often ignore Catholicism's fundamental values when taking positions on LGBTQ issues, the statement said.

"By supporting civic policies that promote discrimination and by opposing policies that would produce equality, these leaders bypass the Catholic Church's proud social justice tradition, the product of more than a century's development of social doctrine that increasingly supports the human rights of *all* people without exception," it reads. "As Catholic theologians, scholars, church leaders, writers, and ministers, we affirm that Catholic teaching presents a positive case for ending discrimination against LGBTQ people. We affirm the Second Vatican Council's demand that 'any kind of social or cultural discrimination... must be curbed and eradicated' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 29). We affirm that Catholic teaching should not be used to further oppress LGBTQ people by denying rights rooted in their inherent human dignity and in the church's call for social equality."

The statement was produced by New Ways Ministry, a national Catholic ministry of justice and reconciliation for LGBTQ people and the church.

"Society's failure to protect LGBTQ people has left them crying out for justice," the statement says. "As disciples of Jesus Christ, we too must hear and respond to this cry by pursuing policies and laws that remedy such grave injustices. To do any less would abdicate our responsibility as Christians to live the Gospel in public life by advancing the good of all people, especially those on the margins."



Maryknoll Srs. Beatrice Meyer and Mary Rose Leifels at an orphanage in Yeung Kong, China, in 1937 (Courtesy of the Maryknoll Sisters)

A milestone for the Maryknoll Sisters

The Maryknoll Sisters are celebrating a century of ministering in China.

Six intrepid sisters and two priests set sail from Vancouver, British Columbia, on Sept. 24, 1921, landing in Hong Kong on Nov. 3.

The congregation has created an extensive website for the occasion, with many photos, biographies of those first sisters, and even portions of their travel diaries.

There are also photos of the sisters currently ministering in China and a video of the work the sisters have done there. Between 1921 and 2004, 210 Maryknoll sisters served in Hong Kong, working in health care and as teachers and social workers.

Dominican sisters launch podcast's second season

The second season of "Hearts Afire" has begun.

A project of the Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, New York, the podcast launched in March with a first season of 10 episodes. Each episode streams live on YouTube and afterward is made available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Audible.

The first episode of the second season premiered Sept. 16 and featured Sr. Maggie McDermott discussing her ministry at the Tolentine Zeiser Community Life Center in the Bronx in New York City and reflecting on the importance of education.

New episodes will premiere every other week and will include:

- "The Life of a Dominican Volunteer," featuring Andrea Meyer of Dominican Volunteers USA;
- "Why We Celebrate the Holy Rosary in October," featuring Sr. Rose Ellen Gorman;
- "Caring for the Sick," featuring Sr. Noreen Walsh;
- "The Importance of Kindness to Others," featuring Sr. Grace Augustine Canevari;
- "What Gratitude Means to Me," featuring Sr. Margaret Flood;
- "Looking Back on a Life-long Ministry," featuring Sr. Liz Engel; and
- "Reflections on Advent, Christmas, 2021, and 2022," featuring Sr. Barbara Ann Sgro.