

LATE LEADER’S LEGACY

POPE FRANCIS SOUGHT TO WELCOME LGBTQ+ PEOPLE



MARTIN MEISSNER, ASSOCIATED PRESS

A public blessing ceremony with hundreds of believers takes place Sept. 20, 2023, in front of the Cologne Cathedral in Cologne, Germany.

Catholic Church doctrine still rejects same-sex relationships

DAVID CRARY
AP National Writer

The papacy of Pope Francis ended with the same core doctrine for LGBTQ+ people that he inherited: The Catholic Church still rejected same-sex marriage and condemned any sexual relations between gay or lesbian partners as “intrinsically disordered.”

Yet unlike his predecessors, Francis incrementally conveyed through his actions, formal statements and occasional casual remarks that he wanted the church to be a more welcoming place for them.

Among activists, there was frustration over the lack of a doctrinal breakthrough, but still there was gratitude this week for his warmth toward them.

Francis, who died Monday, “was a transformational leader who included LGBTQ people in historic ways,” said Sarah Kate Ellis, CEO of the U.S.-based advocacy group GLAAD, who met twice with the pope. “His principles of empathetic listening, inclusion, and compassion are exactly what this divided world needs right now.”

Many conservative Catholic leaders were wary of his LGBTQ+ outreach — and sometimes were angry and defiant, such as when he decided in 2023 to let priests bless same-sex couples.

Africa’s bishops united in refusing to implement the Vatican declaration, saying same-sex relationships were “contrary to the will of God.” Individual bishops in Eastern Europe, Latin America and elsewhere also voiced opposition.

The declaration restated traditional church teaching that marriage is a lifelong union between a man and woman. But it allowed priests to offer spontaneous blessings to same-sex couples seeking God’s grace, provided such blessings aren’t confused with the rites of a wedding.

The beneficiaries of Francis’ welcoming attitude included a community of transgender women — many of them Latin American migrants who worked in Rome as prostitutes — who visited his weekly general audiences and were given VIP seats.

“Before, the church was closed to us. They didn’t see us as normal people. They

saw us as the devil,” said Colombia-born Andrea Paola Torres Lopez. “Then Pope Francis arrived, and the doors of the church opened for us.”

Synod reflects mixed legacy

The pope’s mixed legacy was epitomized by the Vatican’s 2023 synod bringing together hundreds of bishops and laypeople to discuss the church’s future. The advance agenda mentioned LGBTQ+ issues; one of Francis’ hand-picked delegates was the Rev. James Martin, a U.S.-based Jesuit and prominent advocate of greater LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Yet in the final summary of the three-week synod, there was no mention of LGBTQ+ people — reflecting the influence of conservatives who opposed Francis’ overtures to that community.

During the synod, the pope met with a small delegation from the Maryland-based New Ways Ministry, which advocates on behalf of LGBTQ+ Catholics in the U.S.

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Leadership changes add to IRS turmoil under Trump

Worker exodus, threats to groups’ tax-exempt status roil government agency

FATIMA HUSSEIN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The height of tax season was the height of turmoil at the IRS.

The agency shuffled through three acting directors over the course of a week. It’s preparing to lose tens of thousands of workers to layoffs and voluntary retirements. And President Donald Trump is weighing in on which nonprofits should lose their tax-exempt status, an incursion into the agency’s typically apolitical

stance that threatens to further erode trust in federal institutions and weaponize enforcement efforts.

Tax policy experts fear that taxpayer services and collection efforts will face prolonged delays as a result of the rapid changes.

The quick turnover in leadership and other changes are likely to dampen employee morale at the IRS and hurt the agency’s ability to serve taxpayers in a timely manner, says Janet Holtzblatt, a senior fellow at the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center.

“Leadership sets the tone, particularly in this environment,” she said.

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SUSAN WALSH, ASSOCIATED PRESS

This March 22, 2013, file photo shows the exterior of the Internal Revenue Service building in Washington.