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**International Catholic Priest Movements and Reform Groups Urge Church Progress on Key Issues during October meeting**

From October 17 – 20, 2016, forty priests and lay persons from ten countries gathered in Chicago to develop strategies supporting reform in the Catholic Church. The group called for progress on: full equality for women in the Church; rights for LGBT Catholics; fundamental rights for all Catholics; and developing emerging models of parish ministry such as the Bishop Fritz Lobinger model. The conference was hosted by FutureChurch, the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests and Voice of the Faithful.

“Members of priest movements and lay reform organizations from Argentina, Austria, Australia, England, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Slovakia, Switzerland and the United States tackled, head on, the tensions inherent in reform of any kind with honesty and frankness,” said **Deborah Rose-Milavec**, executive director of FutureChurch.

A press conference was held at the end of the conference. It was livestreamed and can be viewed at [facebook.com/FutureChurch](https://www.facebook.com/FutureChurch).

“We are pleased that the entire group felt it could support LGBT peoples with the following statement,” **Jeannine Gramick**, SL, of New Ways Ministry said.

*We, the representative of an international network of priest groups and reform organizations assembled in Chicago 2016, affirm that the dignity of the human person is clearly expressed in the Gospels and the social justice teachings of our Church. It is this dignity that should be the foundation of a truly Catholic response to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and their families.*

*We, therefore, commit ourselves to stand against violence in all its forms—physical, emotional, spiritual and temporal—toward LGBT people. We encourage the Church's leaders and individual members to make the same commitment.*

The lack of women's equality that causes many in the Church much pain was also addressed.

“Women in the gathering asked their male counterparts to prayerfully reflect on male and clerical privilege and to take action,” said **Kate McElwee**, co-director of Women’s Ordination Conference. “They asked them to deeply listen to women in the circle and in their communities and to act courageously for women’s full equality in the Church.”

**Helmut Schueller**, founder of the Austrian Pfarrer-Initiative, initiated work addressing the fundamental rights and responsibilities of Catholics and the development of strategies to ensure that Catholics know their rights and employ them in their work within the institutional Church. **Margaret Roylance**, a representative of Voice of the Faithful, said “we have to work together to break the dominating and dehumanizing power of the Church’s clerical culture that is so damaging to all who are trapped within it.”

**Bob Bonnot**, chair of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests, agreed. He summed-up the sentiments expressed in the group saying, “Our common base is our baptism in Christ as priest, prophet and servant-leaders – that is how we must gather, shedding other identities such as male-female, priest-lay, this group or that group.”

Throughout the conference action plans were developed for implementation at the grass roots level. The next international meeting is being planned.

Organizing Steering Committee

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