

# Gay Catholics Get VIP Treatment at Vatican

A prominent American Catholic gay rights group was given VIP treatment for the first time at an audience with Pope Francis on Wednesday, a move members saw as a sign of change in the Roman Catholic Church.

“This is a sign of movement that’s due to the Francis effect,” said Sister Jeannine Gramick, co-founder of New Ways Ministry, which ministers to homosexual Catholics and promotes gay rights in the 1.2 billion-member Church.

Gramick and executive director Francis DeBernardo led a pilgrimage of 50 homosexual Catholics to the audience in St. Peter’s Square.

They told Reuters in an interview afterwards that when the group came to Rome on Catholic pilgrimages during the papacies of Francis’s predecessors John Paul and Benedict, “they just ignored us”.

This time, a U.S. bishop and a top Vatican official backed their request and they sat in a front section with dignitaries and special Catholic groups. As the pope passed, they sang “All Are Welcome,” a hymn symbolizing their desire for a more inclusive Church.

A list of participants released by the Vatican listed “a group of lay people accompanied by a sister” but did not mention that they were a gay rights organization.

“What this says is that there is movement in our Church, movement to welcome people from the outside closer to the inside,” Gramick said in St. Peter’s Square.

Several months after his election, Francis made his now-famous

remark about how he could not judge gay people who are have good will and are seeking God.

But he so far shown no sign the Church will change its teaching that while homosexuality is not sinful, homosexual acts are.

Last October, bishops from around the world meeting in Rome to debate questions concerning family issued an interim report calling for greater acceptance of gays in the Church.

That passage was watered down in the final version of the report after conservative bishops complained. A second and final meeting on family issues is scheduled for October.

DeBernardo said Catholic gay and lesbian couples and other non-traditional families should be invited to the meeting, known as a synod, to speak to the bishops about their faith and their sexuality.

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