

'Who Am I to Judge?' Vatican Debate on Gays Sparks Strong Reactions

From questions of welcoming a gay son home for Christmas to denying the sacraments for the children of gay and lesbian parents, an ongoing debate on the **Catholic Church's** approach to homosexuality has raised the hopes of some LGBT advocates and provoked the ire of the church's right wing.

At the two-week Synod on the Family convened by **Pope Francis** here, the issue of homosexuality is competing for air time with similar questions of denying Communion to divorced and remarried Catholics or how to respond to couples that live together outside of marriage.

But with a rapidly shifting legal landscape, and a pope who famously asked "Who am I to judge?", the debate over homosexuality is eliciting personal and charged reactions from all corners of the church.

The controversial debate was unwittingly fired up by Australians Ron and Mavis Pirola, the parents of four and delegates to the church family summit.

The Sydney couple told nearly 200 bishops about friends who had invited their gay son and his partner home for Christmas.

"They fully believed in the church's teachings and they knew their grandchildren would see them welcome the son and his partner into the family," the couple told those assembled in the Vatican's Paul VI hall. "Their response could be summed up in three words: 'He's our son.'"

American hard-liner Cardinal Raymond Burke shot back on Thursday that children should be protected from "exposure" to

gay relationships, which he rejected as “evil.”

“If it were another kind of relationship—something that was profoundly disordered and harmful—we wouldn’t expose our children to that relationship, to the direct experience of it,” Burke, who oversees the Vatican court system, told LifeSiteNews.

“And neither should we do it in the context of a family member who not only suffers from same-sex attraction, but who has chosen to live out that attraction, to act upon it, committing acts which are always and everywhere wrong, evil.”

In a **Vatican** briefing Friday, church leaders said the bishops and other delegates were considering the children who bear the “heavy burdens” caused by divorce or other “irregular situations”—code words for nontraditional families headed by unmarried parents, or gay and lesbian parents.

Francis has said the church must be more compassionate toward the gay community, although he has never argued for changing church teaching that homosexuality is “objectively disordered” or suddenly moved to allow gay marriage.

Nonetheless, the change in tone that Francis has called for—and which seems to be finding support at the synod—has given LGBT advocates reason for hope.

“People are angry that the bishops take the side of discrimination rather than equality,” said Francis DeBernardo, executive director of Maryland-based New Ways Ministry, a gay Catholic group that has long been at odds with the American hierarchy.

“[But] they think Francis sees them as brothers and sisters. They don’t feel they are outsiders anymore. Francis has changed the language, and in this synod we are seeing bishops calling for change in pastoral practice.”

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