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Gay Catholic Priest's New Vocation: Working for LGBT Equality



Father Gary Meier's new project, *Rising Voices of Faith*, provides a forum for pro-equality voices.

BY STEVIE ST. JOHN

OCTOBER 29 2014 12:12 PM EDT



A gay Roman Catholic priest has launched a nonprofit initiative called *Rising Voices of Faith* to advocate for LGBT equality in the church.

Father Gary Meier says that over the years the church has created an atmosphere of “silence and shame” regarding LGBT people and their concerns. Meier worries about the message that sends to LGBT people — particularly young people coming to grips with who they are.

Noting a recent *Pew Research Center* poll that found young Catholics largely supportive of LGBT people and marriage equality, Meier tells *The Advocate* he wants to highlight the “positive voices of faith.”

“You’ve got the voice from the pew and the voice from the pulpit,” Meier says. “The voice from the pew has always been acceptance, love, tolerance.”

He calls Rising Voices of Faith “an attempt to capture those voices, [to] give them a pulpit, if you will.”

The Rising Voices of Faith website includes a **Voices** tool through which LGBT and allied people can share their stories and supportive messages. The site also includes a **blog** where Meier plans to write about LGBT rights in religion generally and the Catholic Church specifically. He’s already posted about the apparent “shift in tone, not a shift in teaching” coming from the church under the leadership of Pope Francis.

“Who knows,” Meier says, what will happen as Catholic leaders continue their discussions about same-sex couples. “But I do think the pope is moving us in a positive direction ... at least the conversation is occurring.”

Meier himself has been part of a very public conversation about LGBT people and Catholicism since he **came out in 2013**. He was motivated by the 2012 election, which marked significant advances for same-sex marriage rights in the U.S. That was followed by a backlash; it “really heightened the antigay, hostile voices coming from the pulpit in the Catholic Church,” Meier says.

Concerned about how anti-LGBT rhetoric from church leadership would affect LGBT teens, Meier decided to come out. His anonymously penned book, *Hidden Voices: Reflections of a Gay, Catholic Priest*, was re-released in 2013 — this time with his name affixed.

“I didn’t know what to expect because it’s uncharted territory,” says Meier, noting that only a few priests have come out as gay (although more ex-priests have done so). “I was very scared and nervous ... that being said, the response has been incredible.”

Out of the thousands of emails that Meier has received related to his coming-out, he says only a few have been negative — though he notes Internet comment sections are often not so friendly.

Officially, Meier is still a priest in the archdiocese of St. Louis, though he’s been on leave since 2012 in order to attend graduate school. Although his official status hasn’t changed, he notes that his stipend checks from the archdiocese ceased last summer — not long after his public coming-out.