

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For further information, contact:

Rev. Fr. Geety Reyes, FCM

greyes@anccmail.org

ANCC Priest Fr. Paul Gulya Invited as Panelist at Panama's Annual Human Rights Forum on Conversion Practices

The American National Catholic Church (ANCC) is pleased to announce that Reverend Father Paul Gulya, Pastor Emeritus of Sacred Heart of Jesus ANCC and founder of the Panamanian Upper Room Ministry, has been formally invited to serve as a panelist at this year's Annual Human Rights Forum hosted by Fundación Iguales. The event will take place on December 11, 2025, at the Marriott Renaissance Hotel in Panama City.

Fundación Iguales, a leading human-rights organization dedicated to advancing the dignity and rights of LGBTQIA+ people in Panama and the region, selected Fr. Gulya to participate in the panel "Conversion Practices: Strategies for Reparative Public Policy." The session will gather experts, advocates, and community leaders to address ongoing challenges surrounding so-called "conversion therapy," its documented harms, and the development of public policies that promote healing, dignity, and human rights.

Fr. Paul will offer a pastoral and theological perspective grounded in years of ministry with LGBTQIA+ individuals and families, as well as his direct advocacy against conversion practices. His published reflection, *A Message of Compassion and Inclusion*, articulates the destructive impact of these interventions, the urgent need for pastoral accompaniment, and the Christian mandate to protect the most vulnerable. In that reflection, Fr. Paul writes that "every teenager and young adult deserves to feel safe, loved, and celebrated — not pressured to become someone they are not," urging church and civic leaders to stand firmly against practices that cause deep emotional and spiritual harm.

Rev. Fr. Paul Gulya was ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood in 1981 and later joined the American National Catholic Church, drawn by its radical hospitality and full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people, the divorced, the remarried, and others historically marginalized within faith communities. He has served the ANCC as Vicar for Vocations and as Pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in New Jersey, and he is a proud uncle to a transgender niece — a relationship that deeply informs his advocacy and ministry. Now retired from active parish leadership in the United States, he resides in Panama City with his husband and

offers pastoral counseling and sacramental ministry through the Panamanian Upper Room Ministry.

The American National Catholic Church is an inclusive Catholic community, independent of the Roman Catholic Church, dedicated to making the world a more caring place. Guided by a presiding bishop, the ANCC celebrates the same sacraments as the Roman Church and follows the spirit of reform initiated by the Second Vatican Council. Although sharing core theological and liturgical practices with Roman Catholicism, the ANCC differs on several major points, such as married clergy, female priests, divorce and re-marriage, same-sex marriage, and lay leadership. The Church has parishes across the U.S. and a host of ministries to the alienated, under-served, and forgotten. For more information, visit www.TheANCC.org

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