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Exclusion and the Church

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An international conference at the University of Dayton will explore the tension between religious identity and diversity — a conflict at the heart of some of the most highly charged issues in Christian churches today.

"Exclusion and identity are at the center of so many recent controversies," said Dennis Doyle, conference organizer. "Society at large and many churches are grappling with the changing involvement and expectations of women, gay and lesbian people, immigrants or people with

differing beliefs.

"On one hand, Christianity and contemporary cultural trends push toward greater outreach, toward the crossing of boundaries and the breaking down of barriers, toward the inclusion and embrace of all," Doyle said. "On the other hand, those same forces also rightly emphasize tradition, identity, shared faith and practice, rites of initiation and the maintenance of standards."

Doyle, a professor of religious studies at the University, cited recent news stories:

- The newly seated governor of Alabama said he regarded only Christians as his brothers and sisters.
- A hospital in Phoenix was stripped of its Catholic affiliation after the bishop ruled that a decision to save the life of a mother by terminating her 11-week pregnancy was morally wrong.
- Episcopal, Lutheran and other churches are splitting over the acceptance and ordination of gays and lesbians.
- The Catholic church offers communion to other Christians only under rare, exceptional circumstances and even refuses its own members who do not strictly follow church laws, such as concerning divorce and annulment.

"The conference will feature talks by some of the most important and thought-provoking scholars and writers on these questions in the world today," Doyle said. "They will be exploring some of the fundamental issues related to spirituality and the church."

The conference "Ecclesiology and Exclusion: Boundaries of Being and Belonging in Postmodern Times" will be held Wednesday, May 18, through Saturday, May 21, at the 1700 South Patterson Building on campus. It's the fifth annual international conference of the Ecclesiological Investigations Network, and is co-sponsored by the University's departments of religious studies and philosophy.

The schedule includes:

- Phyllis Zagano, an internationally acclaimed Catholic scholar and lecturer on contemporary spirituality and women's issues in the church, will take part in a panel discussion with three international scholars on her new book *Women & Catholicism: Gender, Communion and Authority*.
- Gerard Mannion, noted scholar in ethics and ecclesiology, is director of the Frances G. Harpst Center for Catholic Thought and Culture at the University of San Diego. He will participate in a discussion about his book *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity*.
- A discussion of exclusion, migration, human rights and the church will include a Dayton human rights expert as well as a British theologian and political philosopher whose work focuses on migration and asylum.
- The Rev. Bryan Massingale, associate professor of theology at Marquette University, who specializes in social ethics and African-American religious ethics, will address a panel responding to his book, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*. The panel will include the Rev. Agbonkhianmenghe Orobator, S.J., an international figure who serves as the provincial of the Eastern African Province of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits).

Other panels will explore exclusion from the perspectives of racial justice, sacramental practices and ecumenical outreach.

For discussions of conference themes, visit "At the Intersection of Faith and Culture," a new University of Dayton blog at <http://religiousstudies.udayton.edu> (url: <http://religiousstudies.udayton.edu/>).

Conference registration including meals is \$275; for graduate students the cost is \$115; one-day registration is \$95.

For more information and to register, visit the conference website at <http://exclusionconference.ecclesiological.net> (url: <http://exclusionconference.ecclesiological.net/>) or contact Katherine Schmidt at kschmidt1@notes.udayton.edu or 937-229-4321.