

BERNÁRD LYNCH

CATHOLIC PRIEST

b. April 30, 1947

**As a gay priest, he
advocated for LGBT
rights at great
personal sacrifice.**

*“Sexuality and spirituality are seen ...
in continuous and consistent conflict.”*

Fr. Bernárd Lynch is a gay Irish Catholic priest, activist and author. Renowned for his work with the HIV/AIDS community, he founded the first AIDS ministry in New York City in 1982. He was the first Catholic priest in the world in an out same-sex partnership.

Lynch was born in Ireland. His father was a deliveryman for the local railway. Lynch attended seminary outside of Belfast and was ordained in 1971 at Saint Colman's Cathedral Newry. After a brief mission in Zambia, he returned to Ireland and came out to another priest, who suggested he go to the United States to pursue graduate studies.

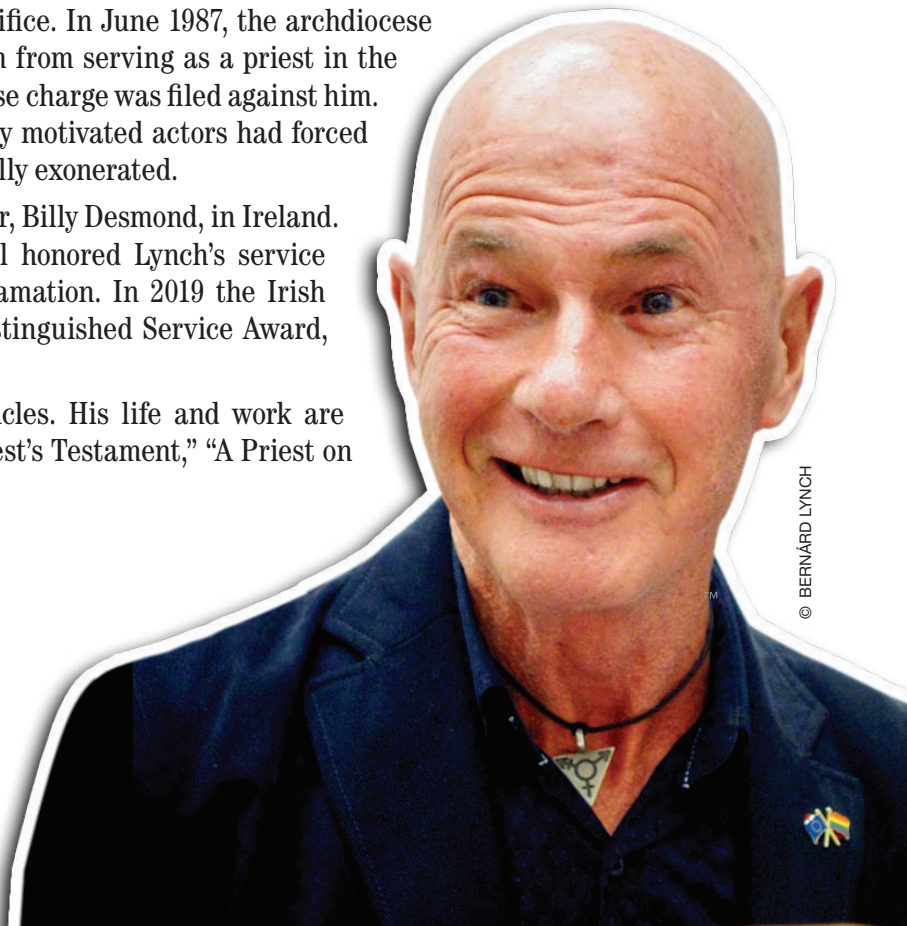
After arriving in New York City in 1975, Lynch completed an interdisciplinary doctorate in counseling psychology and theology from Fordham University and New York Theological Seminary. He began serving as a priest at Saint Gabriel's parish in the Bronx. For 15 years, he served as theological consultant to Dignity New York, an organization for LGBT Catholics and their friends.

In 1982, during the height of the AIDS epidemic, Lynch founded the city's first AIDS ministry program at Dignity New York. The ministry was available to all, irrespective of sexual orientation, race or religion. It aided thousands of people with HIV/AIDS, providing spiritual healing by reconciling individuals with their faiths and their families and by guiding them through their deaths. He also served for 10 years on the Mayor of New York's voluntary Task Force on HIV/AIDS. Despite intense opposition, Lynch became increasingly visible and outspoken as the epidemic worsened. He publicly campaigned and testified for the 1986 New York City bill banning discrimination based on sexual orientation in jobs and housing.

Lynch pursued his advocacy at great personal sacrifice. In June 1987, the archdiocese denied him his canonical rights, thus banning him from serving as a priest in the United States. Shortly thereafter, a false sexual abuse charge was filed against him. Cross-examination in court revealed that politically motivated actors had forced the accuser to testify against his will. Lynch was fully exonerated.

In January 2017, Lynch married his longtime partner, Billy Desmond, in Ireland. On their wedding day, the New York City Council honored Lynch's service to the LGBT and AIDS communities with a Proclamation. In 2019 the Irish government presented him with a Presidential Distinguished Service Award, the highest honor bestowed on citizens abroad.

Lynch has published a number of books and articles. His life and work are featured in three documentary films: “AIDS: A Priest's Testament,” “A Priest on Trial” and “Soul Survivor.”



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