

SPEAK OUT - LETTER TO BISHOP

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin,
Archbishop's House,
Drumcondra,
Dublin 9

14 November 2018

Re: Response to the invitation from Pope Francis to speak out our opinions

Dear Bishop Martin,

I am a practising Catholic in this diocese. I have been active in my local parish of St Attracta's, Meadowbrook and in various Catholic reform groups. I retain faith in the core Good News of Jesus Christ but disagree with clerical teaching on contraception, enforced celibacy, suppression of women and homophobia. I know you are concerned about the Catholic crisis and alienation. I agree with you that the unjust treatment of women in the Catholic Church is the main problem. I welcome your recent letter to priests encouraging parish assemblies to discuss the future. This process should be of benefit as long as real issues are discussed and significant change is allowed to proceed. If the assemblies prove to be only pious talking shops smothered by clerical roadblocks to change, then the exercise may tick some boxes but will only breed deeper cynicism.

Pope Francis has repeatedly asked us to speak out our opinions about the changes that are needed at this time of crisis in the Catholic Church. I am responding to him by writing to yourself as well as my parish priest and the Papal Nuncio. I am inviting other Catholics to do the same. I also welcomed the historic Letter of Pope Francis to the People of God (20 August 2018). He proclaimed that we must say an emphatic "no" to all forms of clericalism and that Catholics should drive forward for massive reform. I presume this means women and men sharing in service, ordained ministry, leadership and governance.

Practising Catholics are concerned that many adult colleagues and most young people have become alienated from Sunday mass and parish involvement. In my opinion, the following factors are among the reasons for Catholic alienation. Bad news about abuses arising from disordered clericalism is pervasive and obscures excellent Catholic services ongoing in homes, parishes and areas of social need. Lay Catholics do not wish to collude with the abuse of children, women, priests or power. Most Catholics have not accepted the clerical teaching on birth control. Catholics value democracy and power-sharing and disapprove of medieval structures of government in the Church. Polls show that a majority of Irish Catholics favour women priests and married priests. They resent the charade of praying for restricted vocations and sense that there are good people in every parish with the vocation for service, ministry and leadership. Catholics are alarmed at the self-inflicted Eucharistic and pastoral care famine and are concerned about overburdened priests. The episcopal policy of bringing in priests from the developing world without consulting the faithful, may help in the short term but only represents cynical retention of clericalism and refusal to ordain married women and men. Catholic people prize the ideal of faithful marriage for life but accept the reality that some marriages break down. We agree with Pope

Francis that such persons should not be denied Eucharist or parish welcome and support. A majority of Irish Catholics reject homophobia and respect LGBT+ persons. Government reports, such as Murphy, Ryan, etc. have sickened people and they have walked away. Adding to the distress, the Roman control brigade appears deaf and irreformable and living in a different world. Accordingly, moving away from clericalism and doing good elsewhere in God's presence is one sensible option for free persons. They are unlikely to return without evidence of significant progress. While such persons remain disillusioned and alienated from Catholicism, they are unlikely to enhance the religious instruction provided to their children in school.

I disagree with the suggestion that the Catholic Church should become smaller and reserved only for a conservative elite as a truly anti-modern group. I think the Gospel is for all people. The Catholic religion needs to be presented in new narrative, modern language and concepts, renewed ritual as well as updated structures. It is not possible to evangelise people today in the language of sexism, misogyny, patriarchy, monarchy, homophobia and exclusion. Elements of that language in the Catholic presentation are a hindrance to parents trying to transmit the faith.

There has been a lack of conversation, dialogue and honest communication among us Catholics. All aspects of worship, ritual and liturgical celebration require urgent review, improvement and updating. Massive reform of ministry, leadership and governance together with parish renewal is sorely needed. There must be greater emphasis on ecumenical cooperation to facilitate enriched faith encounter with Jesus Christ. A deficient and one-sided Church institution cannot convey joyful news of life to the full. A just, collegial and compassionate Church clearly working with the marginalised for justice and improved conditions will prove to be a beacon of hope.

Bishops should listen to priests and people via assemblies and synods in preparation for Vatican III. I trust that bishops will cooperate with Pope Francis from February 2019 onwards to implement a far-reaching plan of action against abuse and clericalism. Thank you for your kind attention to my concerns. I also enclose a copy of my Five Aims for Reform. May the Lord bless you in your life and ministry.

I am,

Yours faithfully,

Joe Mulvaney

cc. Archbishop Eamon Martin, Ara Coeli, Armagh, Northern Ireland BT61 7QY
cc. The Secretary, Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, Columba Centre, Maynooth, Co Kildare
cc. Bishop Raymond Field, 3 Castleknock Road, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15
cc. Bishop Eamonn Walsh, Naomh Brid, Blessington Road, Tallaght, Dublin 24

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