



To all interested in participating in our letter to Pope Francis:

Here is the letter to Pope Francis, having gone through 13 drafts before reaching all of you. We have appreciated your comments both before and after the conference call. We are proud to present this to you and have one question: Does this letter represent in essence what you want to say to Pope Francis and his advisory committee? Can you live with this? Please review this letter more than once. If there is any major concern that is omitted from this letter, please let us know a.s.a.p. Otherwise, this is the version that will go to the Pope.

We are so grateful for everyone for working within our very tight time frame and for the respect everyone demonstrated on the call. We have carefully considered all of the insights and healthy critiques you have offered.

Letter to Pope Francis:

Dear Pope Francis and Brother Cardinals:

It is out of a deep concern for the Catholic Church, in the face of its many crises, that we, representing millions of Catholics from around the world, have collaborated in writing this letter. We are filled with hope that church governance will be discussed at your October meeting and we respectfully request that you give primary consideration to acknowledging the rights and responsibilities of the baptized to have a voice of influence in the decision making of our Church.

Like you, we have experienced the catastrophic loss of trust in our Church, arising from the global revelations of Catholic clergy sexual abuse and hierarchical cover up. Abuses of power at the Vatican bank, as well as damaging disrespect and marginalization experienced by the laity, have caused many of our sisters and brothers to abandon Catholicism altogether. Our Church seems unable to read the signs of the times and so "handing on the faith" to future generations has become ever more challenging.

In our understanding, what lies at the root of many of these problems is the destructive effects of clericalism. We support your desire, Pope Francis, to rid our Church of clericalism in order that we become a community of equals called, through our baptism, to live and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus. All Catholics have the right, innately deriving from our baptism, to have an effective and deliberative voice in the decision-making of our Church. The full participation of the faith community is in accordance with the Gospel, the tradition of the early Church, and the vision of Vatican II.

To this end we have outlined five areas that reflect the hopes and needs of the *sensus fidei*:

1. A Church that embodies the radical hospitality of Jesus in the world

We are inspired, Pope Francis, by your compassion for the poor and desire for social justice as well as your personal commitment to live more simply. We want to work, as sisters and brothers, to build communities free from oppression, violence, hunger, poverty, and the degradation of God's creation. But our commitment to justice is compromised and often viewed as hypocritical because injustice exists within the Church itself. We hope for a time when all Catholics come to experience a joyfully renewed church that truly places hospitality and respect for the dignity and equality of every person at the heart of its lived mission.

2. A Church that welcomes open dialogue among its members

When speaking in Brazil, Pope Francis, you advised that "dialogue, dialogue, dialogue" is a cornerstone of all human progress, and we agree. The freedom of expression (including faithful dissent when required), freedom of reasoned inquiry, and the primacy of an informed conscience are vital to the health of our Church. We believe that prophetic women and men are continually calling us to engage the urgent theological, pastoral, social, and environmental questions of our time in new and inspiring ways. In this light, we recommend reinstating theologians, clergy, and religious who, since Vatican II, have been censored and/or sanctioned for following their conscience. Secondly, as has been expressed by so many Catholics around the world, we believe that the Apostolic Visitation of US Women Religious and the investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious were unwarranted and unjust. Open dialogue cannot exist where fear of punitive action exists.

3. A Church that recognizes the fundamental equality of its members

Catholic teaching tells us that all persons have been created with equal dignity in the image of God. Therefore church structures must reflect this reality. Since all governance in the Church now rests exclusively with ordained male celibate priests, this excludes the vast majority of baptized Catholics. Therefore we recommend a canonical study of the feasibility of linking church governance to baptism rather than to ordination. With regard to ordained ministry, we recommend that identifying the call be based on individual and communal discernment of the candidate's gifts, spirituality, pastoral sense, and theological formation, rather than gender, sexual orientation, or state in life. We reject the sexist exclusion of women from full participation at all levels of the Church. Equally, it is unacceptable to deny our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters access to full participation in every aspect of Church life and ministry. And it is unjust to ordain married male ministers from other denominations, while refusing to accept lifelong Catholic priests who have left the active ministry to marry.

4. A Church with greater participation of the baptized in governance:

Addressing the needs of our Church requires implementing collegial systems and structures based on:

- i) participation of the faithful in the selection and tenure of bishops
- ii) reinstatement of the principle of subsidiarity in parish councils, diocesan pastoral councils, and national conferences of bishops
- iii) inclusion of qualified lay men and women serving in leadership positions in the Curia

Implementation of collegial structures will promote a culture of accountable servant leadership that more fully orients the Church toward the common good.

5. A Church that effectively confronts and prevents sexual abuse

The scandal of clergy sexual abuse can only be overcome when the bishops who facilitate or ignore the abuse are removed from office and brought to justice by church and civil authorities with universal,

binding protocols established and implemented. The Catholic Church must earnestly examine the complex of systemic causes that have led to this scandal of global proportions and do everything in its power to prevent it in the future.

In closing, we ask you once again to recognize the rights and responsibilities of the baptized to participate in the deliberative decision-making of our Church. We offer to send a delegation to the Vatican to discuss our proposal further. We look forward to your reply as, together, we continue this important dialogue for the good of our church. We pray the wisdom of the Holy Spirit be upon you and your deliberations.

Your sisters and brothers in Christ,
[Signatures of every participating organization and individual]

CC: Monsignor Marcello Semeraro, Bishop of Albano, panel secretary
Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President, Pontifical Council for Culture
Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, U.S. Apostolic Nuncio

Signers of the Letter:

The signers will be the names of all participating organizations. Therefore we will need the name of your reform group accompanied by the details outlined below. Individuals not associated with a group are also welcomed to sign.

If you or your organization intends to sign this letter, please get your information back to us at the very, very, very latest, Wednesday, Sept 18 by noon p.s.t. in the U.S. However, sooner is far better for us to organize your information.

If you are accepting the letter as is, simply reply to info@CatholicChurchReform.com and share your information as shown below.

If you have petitions, referendums, initiatives, outcomes of conferences, etc. that you would like to see included in our packet, please send the summary - only the summary - to us in the following format:

1. topic of the petition, referendum, outcome of conference, mission statement, etc.
2. URL address
3. total number of signers
4. geographical region(s) of the signers, if possible
5. status of the signers, if possible (Catholic, former Catholic, priest, religious, other Christian, non-Christian)

If you are a church organization and your group has agreed to support this letter:

1. name of your organization
2. URL
3. mission of your group (a sentence)
4. total number of members
5. geographical region(s) of your members
6. makeup of your members, if possible (Catholic, former Catholic, priest, religious, other Christian, non-Christian)

If you are an individual and not representing an organization:

1. your name or the name of your family
2. region of the world
3. number in your family supporting this letter
4. your status (Catholic, former Catholic, priest, religious, other Christian, non- Christian)
5. your primary concern for reform

If your organization cannot participate openly, please consider supporting this letter anonymously. It is primarily in numbers that we will be able to make an impact and be heard. We need your support. No one, absolutely no one will know who you are except me. And you have my word of honor that I will not reveal the identity of your group.

1. Just say: an organization that wishes to remain anonymous
2. Number in our group
3. Anything else you may want to share is optional - like primary concern for church reform

On behalf of the drafting committee, we appreciate your support and prompt reply to this letter.

Working members: Paul Collins (Australia), Mary Ellen Chown (Canada), Geoff Harris (South Africa), Jose Maria Vigil (Latin America), Didier Vanhoutte (France), Christian Weisner (Germany), Brendan Butler (Ireland), Chris Schenk (U.S.), Rene Reid (U.S.), Janet Hauter (U.S.)

Honorary reviewer: Martha Heizer (Austria) , Contributor: Deborah Rose-Milavec (U.S.)