



To all participating in our letter to Pope Francis:

The letter to Pope Francis and his advisors has been sent and should have arrived to them yesterday or today. Tomorrow is our big day. Press Releases will go out and Press Conferences will be held all around the world.

You can help in one of two ways:

1. For Press Releases, if you are willing to contact your AP or local news producers in your city, please do so. You don't have to be a journalist. Anyone can do this. Just call your local newspaper, radio, and TV station and ask for the newsroom. You can email, fax, or hand-deliver the press release below.
2. For Press Conferences, please check the schedule below and, if you see a press conference scheduled in your city, please lend your support by attending. It is always a stronger message if there is a small crowd gathered to stand with the spokespersons.

Press Release:

Contact: [name of person who called the press conference or sent out the press release]

For Immediate Release

Catholic reformers worldwide push for decision-making voice in their Church

In his recent widely publicized interview to a Jesuit magazine, Pope Francis said that "thinking with the church" is not just a matter of taking orders from the hierarchy. "When the dialogue among the people, the bishops and the pope goes down this road and is genuine, then it is assisted by the Holy Spirit."

It is in this spirit that 100 church organizations, backed by over four million Catholics worldwide, have submitted a letter to Pope Francis and his advisers seeking an audience with the pope to discuss church governance.

They are asking that the pope and the cardinals give priests, religious and laity a major role in church decision making, including the selection of their bishops; that

dialogue and respect for conscience replace authoritarian rule; that everyone be treated equally; that social justice be promoted both inside as well as outside the church; and that those church officials be removed from office who have facilitated or ignored the scandal of clerical sex abuse.

The letter, authored by representatives of numerous reform groups throughout the world, speaks about the current crisis in the church, including sex abuse and fiscal corruption in the Vatican to the destructive effects of clericalism and an all-male celibate governing body.

The supporters include groups such as the U.S.-based Call to Action, American Catholic Council, CORPUS, and We Are Church movement worldwide. The latter represents several million Catholics in nearly 40 countries. Bishops Geoffrey Robinson, Bill Morris and Pat Power, who initiated the petition regarding sex abuse in Australia - with 117,000 supporters to date - have added their full support to the intention of this movement.

Pope Francis has criticized clericalism, saying that the episcopate is a ministry of service and not one of domination. And in his recent interview that received worldwide circulation, he said, "The Church is the people of God, pastors and people put together. The church is the totality of God's people."

But the pope has yet to specify to what extent lay people will be given a voice, a vote, or full citizenship.

The letter supports the direction Pope Francis appears to be moving, states that full participation of all baptized Catholics in the church's decision making is fundamental to church reform, and is firmly based on the Gospel, tradition, and the vision of the Second Vatican Council.

The letter also calls for open dialogue among its members and urges Pope Francis to reinstate theologians who have been censored in previous pontificates and to cease its "unjust and unwarranted" investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

"Our fondest hope is that Pope Francis will accept a delegation of our leaders at the Vatican," said Rene Reid, one of the organizers representing Catholic Church Reform. "He has been reaching out to atheists, gays and others. He wants dialogue. We want that too."

(30)

Press Conferences:

Unless otherwise noted, all press conferences are being held on Wednesday, September 25th.

Madrid, Spain

Location: Colegio Mayor Chaminade, Paseo Juan XXIII, 9, 28040, Madrid

Time of day: 10:30 a.m.

Spokepersons: Luis Ángel Aguilar, Raquel Mallavibarrena

Organizations the spokepersons represent: Redes Cristianas

Raquel Mallavibarrena: rmal@telefonica.net

Toronto, Canada

For location details contact: Ted Schmidt jttschmidt@rogers.com or 416 690 2220

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Spokespersons: Ted Schmidt, Catholic educator, author, activist; Mary Ellen Chown, Catholic Network for Women's Equality (cnwe.org); Fr. Paul Hansen, C.Ss.R. Catholic priest and advocate for Biblical justice living.

London, United Kingdom

Location: St Andrews Church, London SE1

Time of day: 14.30

Spokespersons: Sr Myra Poole SND, Dr Simon Bryden-Brook, Terry Weston

Organizations the spokespersons represent: Catholic Voices for Reform, Catholic Women's Ordination, Catholics for a Changing Church, QUEST, We Are Church UK

Fulda, Germany (where the German Bishops will have their Autumn meeting)

Location: "Hotel am Dom" Wiesenmühlenstraße 6, 36037 Fulda (nahe Dom)

Time: 11:00 a.m.

Names of spokespersons: Elfriede Harth, Gisela Münster, Christian Weisner

Organizations the spokespersons represent: Wir sind Kirche Deutschland

Chicago, IL-USA

Location: Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago

835 N. Rush Street, Chicago IL 60611

Time: 1:00 p.m.

Names of spokespersons:

Janet Hauter, Chair: American Catholic Council

Ryan Hoffmann, Director of Communications: Call to Action

Bob Kopp, President: Chicagoland Voice of the Faithful

Paul Culhane, Secretary: Chicagoland Voice of the Faithful

Anne Brennan, Chair: Chicago Northeast Voice of the Faithful

Rick Springer, Survivor & member of SNAP, VOTF and Coalition of Concerned Catholics

Tony Jannotta, Chair: Coalition of Concerned Catholics

Los Angeles, California, USA:

Location: Our Lady of the Angels Cathedral

Time: 11:00 a.m.

Spokespersons: Mark Day, Press coordinator

Jeff Dietrich, Los Angeles Catholic Worker

Janice Poss, Feminist theologian

Tom Stang and Mary Singaus, Call to Action

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA:

For more info, contact: Charles McMahon at cmcmahon@lrsm.upenn.edu

Ireland:

Date: September 30

Location: Buswell's Hotel Dublin,

Time: 11.30 am

brendan13@eircom.net

Australia:

For more information, contact Tony Biviano at tony@bivnet.com.au

Talking Points:

Who are you?

We are a worldwide gathering of individuals, church organizations, and reform groups who care deeply about renewal in our Church. The letter to Pope Francis and his cardinal advisors was written by representatives from around the world, signed by a hundred reform groups who are backed by over 4 million Catholics. We feel that we are more likely to be heard if we come together - several million of us - and speak as one voice.

What are you asking for?

We are asking the Pope for a place on his agenda and, as he discusses the governance of the Church, we want him to 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.

How did you come together?

Some groups had been considering the possibility of writing directly to the Pope on behalf of their own organization prior to his meeting with his advisors. The question arose as to whether we should invite other groups to be a part of this. We turned to Sister Joan Chittister who was thrilled with the possibility that reform groups might unite. She wrote a letter reminding us all that "until we raise a common voice, we will not only not be heard, we will not even be listened to." Inspired by her letter, over 60 of us from all over the world met on a teleconference call and discussed how we could come together. A drafting committee was nominated and with

representatives from Australia, Latin America, Canada, Spain, France, Germany, Ireland, Austria, South Africa, and the U.S. - we were able to find our common voice in this letter we have today. The UN could learn from us.

Why now?

Because Pope Francis has given us hope. He is speaking openly about the need to rid the Church of clericalism and the need for dialogue. He is breaking the rules of the past and washing the feet of a Muslim woman, reaching out to atheists to assure them that, if they do good, Jesus shed his blood for them, too. He has embraced the gay community and said "Who am I to judge?" We believe he has been put in this position to do what no other pope since John XXIII has been courageous enough to do: to bring needed reform to the church.

What is your hope for the outcome?

Our hope is that by speaking out together--a strong chorus of calls for Reform--we will be able to be in dialogue with the pope and take up where Vatican II left off. We have offered to send a delegation to meet with the Pope to discuss the issues raised in our letter: justice, open dialogue, equality, lay participation in governance, sexual abuse, the right to the sacraments and a host of other concerns. We believe reform is already begun and will continue with all Catholics having a voice in the decision making of our Church.

What is your plan if you are ignored and you receive no response from the Vatican?

We honestly don't think that will happen. Pope Francis appears to be leading the cause for reform. But if he were to allow things to continue as they are, without clearing the log-jam of reforms now in progress, then we will do, as Hans Kung suggested: We will consider this a "time for outrage!" We will cry out all the louder and our number of supporters, now a few million, will double and triple provoking reforms from the bottom up. Reform in the Catholic Church has to come. People will leave in droves if it doesn't.

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