

Subject: Proposal for next steps in process, strategy, and press release



To the contact persons representing Reform Organizations:

You are receiving this email if you represent a church reform group. Most of you signed our last letter to Pope Francis either openly or anonymously. Others of you were unable to get approval from your Boards in time before the letter had to go out to reach Pope Francis and his Council prior to their October meeting. We have had lengthy discussions among our core group about how organizations can balance their need for processing and consulting members, particularly with larger organizations, while also meeting the time criteria of agendas set by the Pope. One of our primary objections is that the Roman Catholic institution signally fails to consult its members. We are making every effort to be the democratic Church we are urging Pope Francis to make our Church become. But as Brendan Butler, one of our members from Ireland said: "How to retain our unity in diversity while pursuing common goals now seems to be our dilemma." And Raquel Mallavibarrena from Spain added: "We will not be consistent with our demands of democracy and participation in the Church [with the pope] if we do not practice these two things in our network."

Proposed Strategy

In light of this challenge, we are proposing three items for your consideration: (1) a process, (2) a strategy, and (3) an open letter and press release. We seem to have come together on a general strategy and are now coming to you with our proposals for our next steps presented in sequential order:

1. Through a press release, we make it known that we are aligned with the vision and spirit of Francis;
2. We communicate with bishops in our respective parts of the world to encourage, or if need be, pressure our bishops to do the same;
3. We begin now to gather data from the interviews Francis has given to determine his priorities and begin drafting a response, a kind of dialogue with him, offering concrete proposals around his issues;
4. This 3rd step could well be the foundation for our next letter to the Pope and his council to be sent prior to their December 3rd meeting;
5. Based on the outcome of the December meeting, we most likely will want to send another letter prior to the February meeting of Francis and his council.

Open Letter and Press Release

The following is our draft proposal submitted by the drafting committee for your consideration. These two items would be released together:

Open Letter to Pope Francis

You have given us hope, both by your words and your example, in setting a positive new tone for co-creating a merciful Church following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are further encouraged to hear that our proposed topic of recognizing the role and responsibilities of the laity was discussed at your recent meeting with the eight Cardinals.

As adult baptized Catholics taking our responsibility seriously for the life of our Communion, it is right that we, the laity, be involved in discussing our role in the Church. Because we have no actual representation at your meeting nor any opportunity for dialogue at this stage, we, as a coalition of worldwide church organizations, are developing a proposal with concrete suggestions for the role of the laity hopefully for inclusion in your December agenda.

Secondly, in a spirit of collegial and loving cooperation, we are sending invitations to bishops around the world to dialogue with us on the role and responsibilities of the laity. We are supportive of your definition clarifying the kind of bishops you seek - bishops who are "close to the people, fathers and brothers ... not having the psychology of princes."

We remain hopeful that the structural and systemic changes being considered will result in making effective the vision that the people ARE the Church (Vatican II) so that we are united in a visible, common mission."

Signed by individuals and worldwide church organizations

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Catholic Organizations Approach Bishops for Dialogue

A week after Pope Francis convened a meeting of eight cardinal advisors, a coalition of over a hundred Catholic Church organizations have delivered a letter to the pope affirming his efforts to recognize the role the laity should have in the church and inviting bishops worldwide to dialogue on this initiative.

Before Pope Francis convenes his December 3 - 5 meeting with his advisors, the coalition is working with lay people, bishops, priests, and religious from around the world to ensure that the baptized faithful be given a meaningful role in the governance of the Church.

Encouraged by the fact that their original requested topic was discussed at Pope Francis'

October meeting, they are developing a proposal with data received during the interim for the Holy Father's December agenda."

In recent remarks to the press, Vatican spokesman Fr. Federico Lombardi said the role of the laity needs to be "adequately and effectively recognized and followed in the governance of the church." Lombardi underscored the fact that most of the Catholic Church's 1.2 billion members are laypeople, yet he concurs that they have no representation in the Vatican.

"Pope Francis has set a positive new tone for the church governance in recent press interviews," said _____ representing _____. "It is only right that we, as adult lay members, be involved in discussing our role in the Church. We need to engage in full dialogue with the bishops to discuss the direction the pope is leading us and to collaborate in our common mission for living the Good News in the Church and in the world."

Proposed Process

This is the process we are using at this time:

Core group determines the proposed next steps and turns the item needed to be written over to the drafting committee.

The drafting committee submits the draft to the contacts representing reform groups (what we are now doing in this newsletter).

Once changes have been included and the draft approved, this version goes out to the individual supporters (currently about 6000).

Once they have had an opportunity to offer their suggestions, the final draft is given to everyone for approval.

Once this approval has been given, the press release and or letter is posted for signatures.

As you can see, this is a tedious process. Therefore, we need members to use the most expeditious means of communicating with their members. Hopefully, most groups can do this via the Internet. We will have to make some adjustments for those organizations who are unable to use electronic means of communicating. Your suggestions are welcomed.

We present these three items: **process, strategy, and press release** for your consideration to take up with your various boards and members. We request your feedback no later than the end of this week, October 18.

To simplify the process, it would be helpful if you do the following:

If you approve of this plan in its entirety, there is no need to respond. Simply wait for the next notification that we have reached an agreement and are ready to move forward.

If you need more time to present this to your Board, that is, if you cannot let us know by the end of this week, please respond to info@CatholicChurchReform.com letting us know how much time you will need.

If you need to translate this, the newsletter is posted on our website. For non-English speaking members, suggest that they visit our website. Click on "Translate this Website" on the top left of the Home page. Then click on the Newsletter tab and they will be able to read the Newsletter. It is a Google translation and therefore not perfect but understandable.

If you have suggestions to offer to the wording of the open letter and press release, please respond to info@CatholicChurchReform.com.

If you do not want to be included in this press release or next letter at all, respond by writing to info@CatholicChurchReform.com.

Model Letter to Bishops

You are encouraged to reach out to the bishops in your part of the world. Physical addresses are provided on the internet. Or contact us and we will help research this for you. The following is a model letter. There is no need to approve it. It is simply provided for you to use or to adapt to your own personal needs.

Dear Bishop _____,

We are sharing with you the letter we sent to Pope Francis and his eight advisors prior to their October 1-3 meeting. It was encouraging to learn that our proposed topic, the role and responsibilities of the laity in the church and in the world, was discussed. We intend to follow up with a proposal for the meeting in December with data gathered in the interim. As Pope Francis has often said, constructive dialogue is essential in resolving critical issues.

We therefore invite you to dialogue with us about the role and responsibility of the laity and more specifically, the five themes that are foundational to our dialogue and representative of the *sensus fidelium*:

1. A Church that embodies the radical justice of Jesus in the world.
2. A Church that welcomes open dialogue among its members.
3. A Church that recognizes the fundamental equality of its members.
4. A Church with greater participation of the baptized in governance.
5. A Church that effectively confronts and prevents sexual abuse.

We are eager to hear your perspectives on these critical issues and to learn where we share common ground. We are sending this letter to all the bishops of (insert country here) as well as other bishops throughout the world. We look forward to hearing from you and if you would prefer, we would be happy to arrange a meeting with you with local representatives from our group.

In Christ,

On behalf of over a hundred church organizations worldwide

We have undertaken a major project that is not without its challenges. As one of our supporters Geoff Harris from South Africa said: "Complete and utter consensus is almost impossible to achieve no matter how democratic we wish to be!" Yet we know we have begun something good, albeit not perfect. And there is no doubt that it is Spirit driven. We all agree that it would be a pity to lose what we have begun and return to our isolationism. So let us continue to share our thoughts, and to seek solutions. Moving beyond the challenges that could divide us, let's move forward to work together on what unites us.

Please continue to share our worldwide coalition with other reform groups of whom you are aware. We also need to keep growing the list of supporting organizations.

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