

To all participating in our letter to Pope Francis:

Thank you for all of your support and for helping spread the word about our letter. The support for our message to Pope Francis is building by the hundreds every day. We have only today and tomorrow for you to sign the letter, invite others to sign, and submit the support of your entire group. Please use these last two days well.

Reform is in the air. We can all feel it. Pope Francis has often spoken of the reforms he envisions. But at his October meeting, he will be surrounded by elderly, traditional, clerical men who are likely to be conservative in their advice. For Pope Francis to continue to make the changes in our Church that are in his heart, he needs our support and encouragement. The solidity of our message and the numbers of supporters are critical to our being heard by the pope and his committee.

Improvements to the letter to the pope:

Over the past 6 days, we have received hundreds of emails enthusiastically endorsing the letter to Pope Francis. We have also gathered the feedback from many of you who have offered small ways that we could improve the draft. The Latin American supporters wanted mention of their need for our Church to address unjust economic systems. The word *sensus fidei*, meaning sense of the faith, has been replaced by *sensus fidelium*, sense of the faithful. Several of you requested that the plight of the divorced and remarried Catholics being withheld full communion needed to be included. Archbishop Parolin, the newly appointed Secretary of State, has been copied on the letter.

The proposal was also made that the topic of lay participation in the selection of bishops be strengthened. After much back and forth email debate about this, the committee felt that there are many variances as to how this should be done. Therefore it was decided to leave the topic generic enough to include the wider perspective of supporters recognizing that this is not our last communication with the pope. We will have opportunity in the future to specify more details of our thoughtful input on reforming our Church.

We listened and, as promised, have incorporated your suggestions into the letter. To the fullest extent possible, the drafting committee has made every effort to preserve the content of the draft as submitted while also including the issues important to you in this final version of the letter. With the listening and attentive pope we have now, coupled with our coming forth to participate with him in the forward movement of our Church, we have every opportunity to bring forth a Church that is open to everyone, respects the equality of all, and allows each of us to live our mission of reflecting Jesus Christ in our day to day lives.

Letter to Pope Francis finalized:

Here is the final letter to Pope Francis with your input noted in red:

OPEN LETTER TO POPE FRANCIS FROM CATHOLICS AROUND THE WORLD

September 20, 2013

His Holiness, Pope Francis

Cardinal Giuseppe Bertello, President of the Vatican City state administration

Cardinal Francisco Javier Errazuriz Ossa, Retired archbishop of Santiago, Chile

Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Mumbai, India

Cardinal Reinhard Marx, Archbishop of Munich and Freising, Germany

Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, Archbishop of Kinshasa, Congo

Cardinal Sean Patrick O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston

Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney, Australia

Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga, Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Re: Request for this to be placed on the advisory council meeting agenda, October 1-3, 2013: Acknowledgement of the rights and responsibilities of the baptized faithful to have an effective voice in the decision making of our Church.

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 **and responsibility**, 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 fidelium*.

1. A Church that embodies the radical *justice* 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 the reign of God on earth* - so that all people may live free from oppression, *war, unjust economic systems*, 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 *justice* 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. *Further, divorced and remarried Catholics should not be withheld from full communion; their personal conscience in this matter should be respected.*

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 authentically accountable 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,

[See attached the 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
Archbishop Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State*

Press Conferences and Press Releases

The letters to the pope and his advisors will go out on September 20 and, on September 25, we will be holding press conferences all on the same day around the world. So far, we have them scheduled in Germany, Spain, Australia, and in the United States, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Philadelphia. If you have media connections and can help send out press releases or even hold press conferences, please email us at info@CatholicChurchReform.com and we will provide you with the materials you will need. Before September 25th, we will send out a schedule of the press conferences in the hopes that if there is one in your city, you might lend your support by attending and standing with the spokesperson. We are still looking for someone to hold a press conference in other major cities including London, Paris, of course Rome, New York, and Washington DC.

The meeting with the Pope and his advisors will be from October 1 to 3. We will all be watching closely. If Pope Francis tackles reforms, he will find he has the wide approval of

people far beyond the Catholic Church. However, if he allows things to continue as they are, without clearing the log-jam of reforms now in progress....then we don't give up. We do as Hans Kung suggested: "The call of 'Time for outrage! Indignez-vous!' will ring out more and more in the Catholic Church, provoking reforms from the bottom up." We will continue gathering signatures and we will shout out all the louder so that our one voice, our very focused and relentless voice, will speak volumes when coming from millions of people all over the world. We will be heard!

Organizations who have signed

To see the organizations who have signed to date, go to <http://www.catholicchurchreform.com/documents/OrganizationsSupportingLettertoPope.pdf>.

If you have already submitted your group or petition, please check to see that you are on the list and that the information is correct. If not, re-send your data or correction to info@CatholicChurchReform.com.

Letter now available in every language

You may now see the final letter to Pope Francis in every language. Go to www.CatholicChurchReform.com and immediately click on the button at the top right: "Translate this website into other languages." A notice may pop up that says: "Translated in Safe Mode...Click here to disable Safe Mode." If that happens, just click that on, select your language, and proceed to the page you want. This now allows us to share this letter with everyone throughout the world with no language barriers (though Google Translate doesn't always do the best job). You will see that the Newsletters are also now being posted on the website so that you can also see these in every language. There is no reason that in the remaining days left, we can't reach 5 million!

To those signing as an individual and not as part of an organization

Please sign the letter online at <http://www.catholicchurchreform.com/letterNew.html>. If you have sent me a request to sign you up, please do this now online. The good news is that there are hundreds of you and I can no longer keep up and manually enter your information. So would everyone who wants to sign individually for yourself and/or your family, click on the above link and sign the letter and then sign again for each person in your family one at a time. If you are signing the letter for 10 or more, then send me the info directly.

To those organizations still sending in your information

You have only today and tomorrow to submit your group. Please submit your data in this format:

- 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 have petitions, referendums, initiatives, outcomes of conferences, etc.:

You may submit these to be 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 your organization cannot participate openly:-

Please consider having your group support this letter anonymously. It is primarily in numbers that we will be able to make an impact and be heard. We need your support and we guarantee the anonymity of your group. Also, if you go to our website and sign the letter, you are already anonymous. Only the data is being forward to the pope, not the names. To submit as an organization,

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