

## **Statement on LGBT Issues at the 2018 World Meeting of Families in Dublin, Ireland Adopted by the International Church Reform Network [ICRN], June 14, 2018**

The Vatican's World Meeting of Families [WMF], to be held in August in Dublin, Ireland, needs to send clear signals that ALL families, including LGBT families will be welcomed. Just as Pope Francis has been meeting regularly with survivors of sexual abuse to listen to their stories, we call on him to meet LGBT families, who have long suffered from another form of clerical abuse.

Moreover, LGBT families should be invited to make presentations as part of the official program so that the other participants, and indeed the whole Church, can hear their stories. What arrangements are being made to guarantee that at least one of the five families who will give witness at WMF will be an LGBT family? Will the program include any parents who have LGBT children? Will a same-gender couple testify about the joys and difficulties of raising children? Will participants hear from a transgender person about their experience of family? Will even one such event happen?

We are doubtful when we remember that the WMF organizers withdrew any reference to LGBT families from their promotional literature. The Association of Catholics in Ireland, We Are Church Ireland, and Ireland's Association of Catholic Priests have all expressed disappointment at deletions from the initial booklet that was to be sent to parishes as a discussion guide. A photograph showing two women hugging, one of whom had a rainbow flag drawn on her hand and a text that acknowledged the Church's ideal of marriage as between a man and a woman but noted that "other unions exist which provide mutual support" were removed from the booklet—presumably at considerable financial cost. Furthermore, a promotional video by a native Irish bishop was censored because he acknowledged LGBT families.

Despite these unfortunate beginnings, we are filled with optimism by encouraging statements regarding LGBT people and the WMF from three of Ireland's bishops (Bishop Brendan Leahy of Limerick, Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh, and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin), as well as the influential Cardinal Christoph Schonborn of Vienna. Pope Francis himself lifts our expectations because we believe his heart is always open to the oppressed and his ears are ever ready to listen to the cries of the poor.

We remain hopeful that the WMF will not be found wanting in practicing, as well as preaching, the Gospel by going to the margins. We are optimistic that all people will be brought to the table and all voices will be heard.

If the WMF in Dublin is to be experienced as a crucial time for the kind of social dialogue advocated by Pope Francis, then the Church needs to be assured that "all are welcome" becomes more than the title of a liturgical hymn.

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The above statement was adopted at the fourth conference of the *International Catholic Reform Network* gathered in Pezinok near Bratislava, Slovakia, June 11–15, 2018. Fifty Catholics from 18 countries and 4 continents participated in the conference. Participants came from Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Great Britain, India, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, South Korea, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United States. Italy and Kenya had to cancel their prearranged attendance at short notice.