

## POSITION STATEMENT: A Call for Dialogue in the Catholic Church, February 16, 2013

The Council of the Baptized respectfully calls for Roman Catholic leadership to be open to the Spirit speaking in the people of God. Silencing people or in other ways punishing those who are calling for open discussion of the Church's positions on the role of women in sacramental ministry, on optional celibacy for the ordained, and on sexual identity and morality is detrimental to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel message. We call upon our local church leaders and the leadership of the universal church, the bishops, to encourage the faithful to speak, as Canon Law provides: 212 §3: According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons.

We make this appeal to our bishops now, as the College of Cardinals contemplates electing a new pope, because they have the power by their choice to move the church toward the openness promised at Vatican II, and because there are currently many Catholics suffering from the exercise of coercive power:

Locally, there are priests, deacons and parish staff who "stay under the radar," reluctant to speak prophetically for fear of reprisals. There are Catholics in good standing, individuals and groups, who are prohibited from speaking in this Archdiocese and from meeting on church property.

Nationally, there are congregations of religious sisters who are "investigated" and micromanaged; Roy Bourgeois, Maryknoll priest, who lost his community and priestly ministry because he did not recant his statements of conscience; and theologians whose freedom of inquiry is threatened by public censuring of their work.

Internationally, there are bishops and priests who have lost their ministries for raising questions about matters of governance and ethics. Most recently, there is the case of Tony Flannery, Irish Redemptorist priest for thirty-nine years, who has been suspended from priestly ministry and instructed by the Vatican to be silent. The author of six books and a regular contributor to the Redemptorist magazine, he questioned official church teaching on clerical celibacy, contraception, homosexuality and the ordination of women. He also helped to establish the Association of Catholic Priests (ACP), representing more than 850 priests in Ireland. After a year of discernment, Flannery has decided he cannot in conscience accept the restrictions on his speaking and writing decreed by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). Interviewed by Michael Enright of the Canadian Broadcasting System on Sunday, February 3, Flannery said he does not know who made accusations against him and has not been contacted personally by the Vatican or by Irish bishops. The CDF sent the threat of excommunication to him through his Redemptorist superiors in Canada, on documents with no letterhead and no signatures. Flannery expresses his fear for the future of the church in Ireland in a radio interview: <http://www.cbc.ca/thesundayedition/shows/2013/02/03/dissident-irish-priest-censured-by-vatican/>

Flannery's supporters include the [Irish Association of Catholic Priests](#), [National Council of Priests of Australia](#), the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests, with four signers from Minnesota, and the Catholic Church renewal group We Are Church Ireland, initiator of the following petition to be sent to the Vatican: [http://www.avaaz.org/en/petition/To\\_have\\_Fr\\_Tony\\_Flannery\\_returned\\_to\\_his\\_priestly\\_ministry/?eCDVSdb](http://www.avaaz.org/en/petition/To_have_Fr_Tony_Flannery_returned_to_his_priestly_ministry/?eCDVSdb) <http://www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie/2013/02/american-priests-seek-to-join-acp-to-support-tony-flannery>.

The Council of the Baptized supports an open and collegial reasoning together among laity and clergy on all questions that affect the life of the Church.

Our website is [www.councilofthebaptized.org](http://www.councilofthebaptized.org) and we can be contacted at [info@councilofthebaptized.org](mailto:info@councilofthebaptized.org)