



Dublin, 25th August 2018

Open letter to Pope Francis

from activists and volunteers of **All Together in Dignity Ireland**

Dear Pope Francis,

As you soon arrive for your welcome visit to Ireland, **we would like to wish you two days of positive and inspiring meetings with all the people you plan to meet:** from our President to the families stuck in homelessness, from the participants in the World Meeting of Families to our neighbours and friends in the Lady of Lourdes Church in Sean Mc Dermott Street.

We too, had hoped to meet you at the Famine Statues and the Human Rights and Poverty Stone on the Customs House Quay to share with you our stories of struggles, courage and dignity. It won't happen this time, sadly, but we still dream of travelling with you the symbolic walk to liberation from the tragedy of the great hunger to the rallying Human Rights call of Father Joseph Wresinski.

We know your stay in Ireland will be challenging, as well as joyous.

In our ATD community group, as in the whole of Irish society, some of our friends and volunteers have been deeply hurt and traumatised by the violence and abuse by clergy of the Catholic Church. We are aware that in many situations, children, women and vulnerable adults found themselves in industrial schools, mother and baby homes or laundries because of their lower socio-economic backgrounds. We also know that the widespread consequences of the harm can be seen today in the streets of Irish towns and cities when people end up in homelessness or with addiction or mental health issues because they didn't find the support needed after experiencing violence and abuse.

Some of us will gather on Sunday 26th August at the Stand4Truth event in solidarity with everyone who has been harmed. You will be well aware that you arrive in a very different Ireland to the one Pope John Paul II visited in 1979. Decades of investigation and revelation, forced by the courageous actions of those abused by the crimes and cover-ups, have transformed Ireland's relationship with the institutional Church.

Some of us will also be in the Phoenix Park to pray and listen to you because the message of the Gospel and their personal faith are important parts of who they are, and inspire their commitment to social justice.

We try to build unity in this diversity as we seek to come together to find better ways to leave no one behind.

Let us now share with you some of the messages we would have discussed with you if we had met on Custom House Quay.

Many of us would have been prepared **to tell you our stories of hardships, exclusion, but also solidarity and recovery.** We would have shared with you **our dreams for a fairer and more sustainable Ireland.**

As an expression of our best wishes for your visit to Ireland, we will to send you the two books we published in the past year, named : "[If Only You Knew](#)" and "[Ireland, I Have A Dream](#)".

And here we would also include all the stories of courage and dignity presented by Brother Martin Byrne in his [20-year long series of books](#) inspired by a powerful theology coming from the streets of the brave and deprived North Wall area in Dublin. We hope that you will not leave Ireland without a copy of this series - a gem for a possible future for the Christian faith in Ireland.

We also would have commended you for being part of the Heads of States who were at the United Nations on the 25th September 2015 on the day of the adoption of the transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As you wrote in 'Laudato Si', we do believe that **a truly sustainable approach 'must integrate questions of justice, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.'**

Since 2015 many stakeholders of Irish Civil Society have come together in the Coalition 2030 to call for a comprehensive approach by the Irish Government to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. But to make this happen, we need more dedication and more leadership from all the spiritual and religious stakeholders.

In this spirit, we hope you will invite the leaders of the Catholic Church in Ireland to become strong activists and leaders for the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the Agenda promise: to [leave no one behind](#). Together we have to end poverty, to fight inequalities and to act on climate change. **And the promise invites us to reach the furthest behind first.**

Finally, as a community group focused on building participatory and human-rights based approaches to poverty and social exclusion issues, we also welcome your initiative in 2017 to create the **Catholic World Day of the Poor**.

Together with the [United Nations Day for the Eradication of Poverty](#) observed on 17 October each year, and also initiated by a Catholic priest, Father Joseph Wresinski, the marking of these two days should reinforce the voice, the role and the dignity of the poorest and most marginalised citizens in our communities.

This year, the [Catholic World Day of the Poor](#) will be celebrated, fortuitously, on Sunday 18th November, just one day after the first anniversary of the adoption by Ireland and by all the EU countries of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#): 20 key principles including the rights to minimum income, health care and housing.

In the coming weeks, we will appeal to the Irish Catholic Church that the mobilisation around the Catholic World Day of the Poor will call for a momentum to improve social and housing policies in Ireland.

This momentum will include the marking of the UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17th October, the Catholic World Day of the Poor in November and the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10th December.

As we approach this campaigning time, we hope that on 18 November, Catholic World Day of the Poor, the Irish Catholic Community will be ready to support our 17 November action **to call for a robust implementation of the newborn European Pillar of Social Rights.**

Once again, we wish you a very fruitful and inspiring stay in our country.

We look to you as the Pope of the Catholic Church which has to become poor again to walk with the poor.

We are thankful to our friends who lead the way in Ireland, such as Sister Bernadette McMahon DC, Father Frank Brady SJ, Sister Margo Delaney SHF, Sister Margo Mulvey IBVM, Brother Martin Byrne CBS, Sister Lelia Newman OP, Brother Patrick Madigan CBS, Father Peter Mc Verry SJ, Father Sean Healy SMA and Sister Stanislaus Kennedy RSC. We also remember here Sister Caoimhín Ní Uallacháin OP who, sadly, passed away earlier this year.

We look to you as a Pope of change.



Gerald Doherty,
Chair of the Board,



Pierre Klein
National Coordinator

on behalf of the members of All Together in Dignity Ireland.

All Together in Dignity Ireland (ATD) is an Irish Charity member of ATD Fourth World International, a non-governmental organisation with no religious or political affiliation which engages with individuals and institutions in 40 countries to find solutions to eradicate extreme poverty. Working in partnership with people in poverty, ATD's human rights-based approach focuses on supporting families and individuals through its grass-roots presence and involvement in disadvantaged communities in both urban and rural areas, creating public awareness of severe poverty and influencing policies to address it.

National website: www.atdireland.ie International website: www.atd-fourthworld.org

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