

BOSTON COLLEGE

James M. Smith
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140 Commonwealth Avenue
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467



July 9, 2010

Sr. Marianne O'Connor, OSU
Director General
Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI)
St Mary's
Bloomfield Avenue
Donnybrook
Dublin 4
Republic of Ireland

Dear Sister O'Connor,

I am writing to you on behalf of the survivor advocacy group Justice for Magdalenes (JFM). I serve on JFM's Advisory Committee. But I also write on the recommendation of Cardinal Sean Brady and other members of the Irish Bishop's Conference.

On June 24th last, I, together with a delegation from JFM, met with Cardinal Brady at his residence in Armagh. We were invited to meet after a series of correspondences between the Cardinal and myself in which I forwarded information regarding the ongoing JFM campaign to bring about (i) an formal apology from Church and State, and (ii) the establishment of a distinct redress scheme for all Magdalene survivors. Cardinal Brady had also been reported as stating his intention to find a "just solution" for Magdalene survivors (see attached).

Our meeting focused on the need to establish the State's complicity in the operation and function of these institutions, thereby broadening the obligation to respond beyond the four religious congregations who operated the laundries to include the State, families, and the wider Irish society. As reported by the Irish Times (see attached), Cardinal Brady encouraged JFM to "continue its efforts to establish dialogue and a process of justice and healing for all concerned." Cardinal Brady also characterized the JFM presentation as "fair and balanced."

Contacting you was one of the specific recommendations from the meeting, in the hope that you might facilitate a presentation for CORI's executive board detailing JFM's campaign thus far, and thereafter hopefully that you could arrange a meeting with representatives of the four religious congregations involved (i.e., Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of Charity, Good Shepherd

Sisters, Sisters of Our Lady of Charity). I would underscore that our primary objectives in requesting these meetings is to initiate dialogue and discussion, to listen to the perspective of the religious congregations, and to work to allay anxieties or concerns regarding the nature of what we are seeking to achieve.

Please feel free to contact me if you require any additional materials. JFM tries to operate a professional and up-to-date website, and it contains information about JFM, our mission, recent press releases and media coverage of our campaign, newsletters, and resources such as a Research Guide for Relatives of Magdalene Women (www.magdalenelaundries.com).

In conclusion, I assured Cardinal Brady that JFM would not advertize our June meeting in advance. Journalists or photographers were not invited. None turned up. JFM issued a Press Release after the fact (see attached). I would happily commit to similar assurances for any meeting(s) between JFM and CORI or its members.

Yours Sincerely,

James M. Smith, Ph.D.

James M. Smith
Associate Professor
English Department and Irish Studies Program
Boston College

cc. Cardinal Sean Brady, Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of All Ireland
Bishop John McAreevy, Diocese of Dromore, Irish Bishops' Conference
Harry Casey, Executive Administrator, Irish Bishops' Conference
Lucy McCaffrey



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Brady: Church wants to find 'just solution'

By Claire O'Sullivan

THURSDAY, APRIL 01, 2010



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ALL IRELAND Primate and Archbishop of Armagh, Cardinal Seán Brady has told a clerical abuse survivors group that the Church is committed to finding a "just solution" to the victims of the Magdalene Laundries.

A representative group from Survivors of Church Abuse (SOCA) met with the Cardinal yesterday where they raised the Magdalenes' ongoing campaign for an apology and a redress scheme.

Cardinal Brady told the former clerical abuse victims that he personally believed the Pope's pastoral letter and its apology placed a responsibility upon the religious orders to address what had happened in the country's laundries.

"The cardinal told us the Church is committed to finding a just solution for the victims of the Magdalene Laundries," said Patrick Walsh of SOCA.

Justice for the Magdalenes (JFM) contacted the cardinal to inform him of their proposed redress scheme last November.

Meanwhile, an ad-hoc Dáil committee met with Magdalene Survivors United, including five former laundry residents, Maureen Sullivan, Mary Collins, Marina Gambold, Mary Smyth and Maureen Taylor last week.

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Labour deputy Kathleen Lynch, who is a member of the committee, said one of the women told how she had been sentenced to the laundries by the Children's Court while another told the tale of how, when after a dispute with her British-based family, she was sent to relations in Dublin by her mother.

Upon arrival at Dublin airport, she was met by two gardaí who took her to a laundry.

Ms Lynch said that the Dáil committee is hoping to arrange a formal meeting with the Departments of Education, Justice and the Taoiseach to discuss the Magdalene survivors' growing case for an apology and redress.

Since last November, 11 women have come forward to take a class action against the state for their role in sending women to the laundries.

This story appeared in the printed version of the Irish Examiner Thursday, April 01, 2010

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The Irish Times - Saturday, June 26, 2010

Brady encourages Magdalene survivors in talks with church

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GENEVIEVE CARBERY and PATSY McGARRY Religious Affairs Correspondent

PRIMATE OF All-Ireland Cardinal Seán Brady has encouraged Magdalene survivors in their efforts to establish dialogue with religious congregations.

The cardinal met representatives of advocacy group Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) for two hours at his residence in Armagh on Thursday evening. He said yesterday it was a welcome opportunity to listen to the perspective of the JFM on “the story of the involvement of church, State and society in the former Magdalene laundries”.

“By today’s standards much of what happened at that time is difficult to comprehend,” he said.

He hoped that the perspective of those who operated the laundries would also be “respectfully heard and listened to”.

The cardinal said he encouraged the JFM to “continue its efforts to establish dialogue and a process of justice and healing for all concerned”.

Prof James Smith, of JFM and Boston College, said he was pleased the bishops “seemed to take on board that time is of the essence in bringing restorative justice to this elderly and ageing population. We also underscored that the church’s archives hold the key to detailing the extent of the State’s involvement in the Magdalene system.”

Dr Katherine O’Donnell of UCD’s school of social justice said: “The meeting was particularly productive in identifying that the ethical release of the church’s archives could result in speedy and beneficial actions.”

Meanwhile, the Department of Justice said it would explore the possibility of a State apology to Magdalene survivors.

Members of JFM met department officials yesterday. It was part of a series of meetings between JFM and Government officials over the past few months.

The department wanted to ensure that the State was not admitting any liability in any apology, JFM said in a statement.

The State was “relying on the fact that an elderly and ageing group . . . will not be in any position to pursue justice through the courts,” Claire McGettrick of JFM said.

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PRESS RELEASE
24th June 2010

Cardinal Brady hopes Catholic religious will engage with Justice for Magdalenes (JFM)

Cardinal Sean Brady followed his assertion on April 1st, 2010 that he wanted a “just solution” for Magdalene survivors with an invitation to JFM to meet with him to further discuss “a pathway forward.” Today (Thursday, 24 June), a delegation from survivor advocacy group JFM met with the Cardinal and key members of the Bishops’ Conference committee who work with survivors of institutional abuse.

The meeting lasted two hours and the Cardinal expressed his appreciation for Professor James Smith’s (Boston College/JFM Advisory Committee) presentation addressing State complicity in the operation of the Magdalene laundries. He said that JFM offered “a fair and balanced” account, and he expressed his wish that other religious, most notably the leaders of the Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI) and relevant religious congregations, would engage JFM in dialog and ensure restorative justice for Magdalene survivors.

The Cardinal noted that JFM’s work to date has highlighted State complicity. Moreover he welcomes the group’s efforts to understand how families and the wider society, as well as Church and State, are culpable in the treatment of these women and children. Bishop John McAreavy added that Prof. Smith’s presentation was “broad and inclusive”.

Cardinal Brady directed members of the Bishops’ Conference committee to work with JFM in continuing to “establish trust” between the religious congregations and JFM in order to develop understanding and bring about healing.

Prof. Smith said, “It was an encouraging meeting and I was pleased the Cardinal appreciates that time is of the essence in bringing restorative justice to this elderly and aging population. We also underscored that the Church’s archives hold the key to detailing the extent of the State’s involvement in the Magdalene system.”

Dr, Katherine O’Donnell (UCD School of Social Justice, Director of Women’s Studies/ JFM Advisory Committee) said, “The meeting was particularly productive in identifying that the ethical release of the Church’s archives could result in speedy and beneficial actions including, for example, a review of the burial plots to ensure that they are an accurate and dignified memorial and facilitation of information useful for the adoption search and reunion process.”

JFM is committed to building upon today’s meeting in its efforts to bring about (i) a formal apology from Church and State and (ii) the establishment of a distinct redress scheme for all Magdalene survivors.

Note to editors: JFM will issue a further statement around lunchtime tomorrow (Friday 25th June) following a meeting with senior officials in the Department of Justice.

[ENDS]

Contact Details:

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