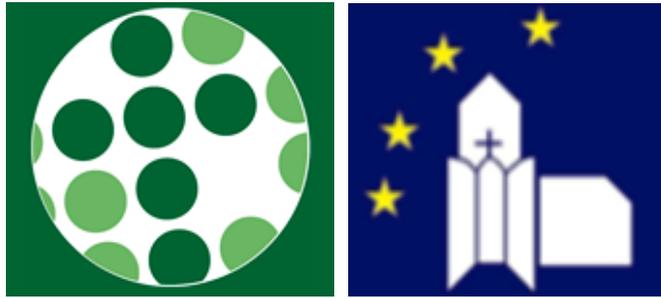


We Are Church International & European Network Church on the Move



Joint Press Release

8 March 2018

Five Years of Pope Francis: Hope has been Raised, Dramatic Action Awaited

Five years after the election of Pope Francis (13 March 2018) We Are Church International (WAC-I) and European Network Church on the Move (EN) appeal to Pope Francis to continue the reform process of the Roman Catholic Church and to intensify it with dramatic action. The election of the first South American Pope, who began his Papacy by asking the people of the world to pray for him, stirred great hopes in the hearts of many Catholics, especially many who had been frustrated by the failure of our Church to realize the promises of the Second Vatican Council, which was seen as having great potential to be more faithful to the Gospel and for modernizing aspects of the Church.

Toady, delegates and representatives of the international Catholic Church Reform and Social Justice movements give Pope Francis decidedly mixed reviews. **WAC-I and EN** praise Francis for modelling a life in solidarity with the poor, encouraging dialogue within and beyond the Church, attempting to rein in hierarchical abuse of the Church's wealth and power, and speaking in ways that are accessible to many. Yet, many of his reforms have been resisted by Church officials appointed by the previous Popes, John Paull II and Benedict XVI. **WAC-I and EN call on the Cardinals, bishops, and all Catholics to embrace Francis' vision of the Church as servant and steward.**

WAC-I and EN leaders commend Pope Francis for his relentless advocacy on behalf of refugees and migrants, for his strong engagement for peace founded on justice in the world, for his proposal of nonviolence in every conflict, his visible presence among communities typically marginalized, and opting for simplicity in his personal life. They applaud the stewardship of the Earth promoted in Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*. They recognize his courage in chastising and demoting bishops and cardinals who flaunted wealth and instructing church leaders to focus on pastoral care rather than bureaucracy. They appreciate that the Pope has focused on under-represented areas of the globe in the appointment of new Cardinals and has emphasized pastoral skills in designating bishops. They support the Pope's attempts to open dialogue on issues of importance to families and youth and inviting input from members of the church in preparing for these Synods. The groups celebrated Pope Francis' efforts to increase the accountability in financial matters, and his respectful engagement with leaders and members of other faiths.

The groups also expressed significant disappointment with the lack of substantive changes in some areas of Church policy and dogma, and about the opposition the Pope's attempts at reforms have met within the Curia. They noted that the People of God remain excluded from decision making at all levels of the Church and Pope Francis call for dialogue has not been heeded at all levels. They also noted that there has been no significant movement on the inequality of women in the Church, despite the appointment of a study commission to consider the questions of women in the diaconate. The Pope has maintained the Church's emphasis on complementarity, which prescribes roles for women and men based on gender, and on recognizing only the permanent, exclusive marriage of a man and woman open to the procreation and nurture of children. This means that divorced, remarried, cohabiting, LGBTI people, and those who use contraceptives, build families

through assisted reproductive technologies, or have abortions are often excluded from full participation in the church. The Pope did appoint a commission to deal with the issue of clerical abuse in the Church, but opposition to its work among Curial members led to it being unable to accomplish its mission. A strong advocate and survivor of abuse resigned in protest, the Commission's authority was allowed to expire, and when recommissioned, it was with members many characterize as weaker and less likely to challenge Church leadership. The Church should give up the procedures of condemnation and excommunication and show more respect for pluralism, especially in theology. Christian unity remains blocked by our Church refusing to accept shared communion. WAC-I and EN also noted that, despite several invitations, the Pope has failed to meet with leaders of Church reform and renewal networks to address areas of common concern.

We Are Church International and European Network Church on the Move call on Pope Francis to renew his commitment to the comprehensive reforms needed to free the Catholic Church from rigid hierarchical tradition, engage more of the laity and especially women, and ensure that the Church truly lives the Gospel of Jesus in a world that is in deep conflict and turmoil. We pray that this fifth anniversary marks a time of radical renewal for our Church.

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The European Network Church on the Move (EN) is a spontaneous convergence of organizations – associations, communities, informal groups and networks – of European Christians who are in majority Catholic, sharing

(1) the vision of a Church prophetic, ecumenical, liberating, supporting, loving, which neither excludes nor discriminates and which follows on the steps of Jesus the liberator

and

(2) the will to work, respecting cultural and religious diversity, for peace, justice, freedom, human rights and democracy, including in the Catholic Church (Cf Declaration of rights and freedoms in the Catholic Church, European Network 1994)

<http://www.en-re.eu/index.php>

We Are Church International (WAC-I) founded in Rome in 1996, is a global coalition of national church reform groups. It is committed to the renewal of the Roman Catholic Church based on the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the theological spirit developed from it.

<https://www.we-are-church.org/413/index.php>