

OPEN LETTER FROM THE ARCHBISHOP OF DUBLIN (IRELAND)

In my capacity as Archbishop of Dublin I have come to know the work of *Coping International*, an organisation dedicated to the needs of children of Catholic Priests, their mothers as well as their fathers.

This letter is a greeting to you if you are the child of a priest, or if you are a woman who has had a child with a priest or indeed if you are a priest who has fathered a child and for whatever reason live in silence. I want you to know that there is a place for you in the church; there exists pastoral support to assist your concerns.

The needs of children of priests and their family are manifold. Where adult centred needs are placed ahead of those of a child, the basic rights of a child are easily violated. Silencing and stigmatizing in childhood has long term psychological effects into adulthood. The Irish Catholic Bishops have condemned the imposition of secrecy agreements in such situations. (Irish Catholic Bishop's Conference., 2015)

Pope Francis has noted in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*: “How can we issue solemn declarations on human rights and the rights of children, if we then punish children for the errors of adults? If a child comes into this world in unwanted circumstances, the parents and other members of the family must do everything possible to accept that child as a gift from God and assume the responsibility of accepting him or her with openness and affection.” (Francis, Pope, 2016, p. 167)

Coping International is there to help, free of charge, any child of a priest who wishes to come forward. Women who are mothers of the children of priests should not be ostracized or made feel shame of any kind. They are mothers and human beings before all else and this ought to be respected regardless of circumstance. If a child comes into the world in unwanted circumstances, we must all make sure that child feels the love, warmth and tender care of the Church as a mother, reflecting the tender loving care of the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

I am told that *Coping International* is working on guidelines on how to respond to these human challenges from a pastoral point of view.

In 2014 the Holy See sent a message to the founder of *Coping International* asking him to “be assured of His Holiness’ appreciation for the Concerns and charitable sentiments that motivate your initiatives together with a remembrance in his prayers.” (Pope Francis, 2014)

+Diarmuid Martin
Archbishop of Dublin