Culture
News



by Brian Roewe

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September 22, 2017
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When a door closes, God opens a window. Or in this case, a cardinal does.

So it goes for Jesuit Fr. James Martin, who, after a series of speaking appearances were canceled in recent weeks, received a fresh offer Friday from Cardinal Blase Cupich to address his Chicago archdiocese over two nights during the coming Lenten season.

The Windy City invite caps a turbulent week where Martin defended himself — as did two bishops and multiple Catholic commentators — against far-right Catholic groups that launched online campaigns seeking the best-selling author's removal from talks due to disapproval with his recent book on LGBT Catholics. Those efforts most notably resulted in a withdrawn invitation from Theological College at the Catholic University of America for Martin to address its upcoming alumni gathering.

Early Friday evening, the Chicago archdiocese tweeted, and Cupich retweeted, that Martin would offer Lenten reflections at Holy Name Cathedral the evenings of March

22 and 23.

"I'm grateful that Cardinal Cupich has invited me to speak in the Archdiocese of Chicago. He is an open, thoughtful and compassionate bishop, and has long been a friend of the Jesuits," Martin, editor at large of America magazine, told NCR. "I look forward to speaking with the people in Chicago about Jesus, the one who is at the center of my life and at the heart of all of my ministries."

A focus on Jesus was also scheduled for Martin's now-canceled Oct. 4 talk at Theological College, and was the topic on Tuesday when he addressed 2,500 principals and teachers of the New York archdiocese. Jesus was also the theme set for the Jesuit's talks later in October during a dinner of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in New York City, and at a lecture in London for Cafod, the official overseas aid agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

All three of those gigs were called off amid a wave of protests from far-right Catholic groups, including Church Militant, LifeSiteNews and Fr. John Zuhlsdorf ("Fr. Z"), who opposed Martin's appearances at those events due to objections with his recent book *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter Into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity*.

Building a Bridge, which has sold 25,000 copies in the U.S., looks at ways that the church can better minister to its members who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, and how the sides can enter into greater dialogue and understanding. While Martin said the vast reception has been "overwhelmingly positive," the book has also brought often-personal backlash against him, particularly on social media.

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Cupich is the latest U.S. bishop to send a signal of support to Martin, a popular priest known for his best-selling books and frequent media appearances, including a stint as the "official chaplain" of comedian Stephen Colbert's "The Colbert Report." In April, he was named a consultor by Pope Francis to the Vatican's Secretariat for Communication.

Earlier in the week, Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput and San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy both penned essays lending backing to Martin's credibility as an effective evangelizer for the church, and condemning the campaigns aimed at trashing the Jesuit's reputation. McElroy offered a book jacket endorsement to *Building a Bridge*, as did Santa Fe Archbishop John Wester, Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, and Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life.

The invite to come to the Chicago archdiocese is the second Martin has received since the speaking cancellations became public. Holy Trinity Church, in Washington, offered to host him at the parish on Sept. 30, which Martin also accepted.

Martin has given roughly two dozen presentations on *Building a Bridge*, including at Fordham University and Villanova University.

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A version of this story appeared in the **Oct 6-19, 2017** print issue under the headline: Fr. James Martin univited from talk at CUA seminary.