News



People attend Mass at Knock Shrine in Ireland Aug. 21, 2017. The Mass launched the one-year countdown to the 2018 World Meeting of Families in Ireland. (CNS/courtesy John McElroy)



by Sarah Mac Donald

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A U.S. group, which campaigns for the full inclusion of LGBT people in the church, has called on Dublin Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, president of the World Meeting of Families 2018, and other Irish Catholic leaders, to restore the image of a same-sex couple to the booklet, "Amoris: Let's talk Family! Let's be Family!"

The call by DignityUSA was made in response to the decision by the World Meeting of Families office in Dublin to reissue the "Amoris" resource booklet without an image of a same-sex couple which was reproduced in the first edition on page 24.

"Amoris: Let's talk Family! Let's be Family!" is a resource for Catholic families in Ireland preparing for the World Meeting of Families 2018 taking place Aug. 21-26, named after Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation on the family, *Amoris Laetitia*, released in April 2016.

The following paragraph was also deleted from the new edition's text: "While the Church upholds the ideal of marriage as a permanent commitment between a man and a woman, other unions exist which provide mutual support to the couple. Pope Francis encourages us never to exclude but to accompany these couples also, with love, care and support."

"Amoris: Let's talk Family! Let's be family!"

View the original and reissued editions of the resource booklet:

Original edition: "Amoris: Let's talk family! Let's be family!"

Original Page 24 of "Amoris"

Reissued edition: "Amoris: Let's talk Family! Let's be family!"

Reissued Page 24 of "Amoris"

In all, six images which could have been interpreted, even obliquely, as an LGBT couple or a non-traditional family, have been removed or replaced by non-controversial ones, such as families with a father, mother and children.

News of the move prompted Mary McAleese, former president of Ireland, to express concern that the World Meeting of Families in Dublin will marginalize the LGBT community. In the past, McAleese has spoken about how her son, Justin, a devout Catholic, was bullied for being gay.

"Ireland has a unique opportunity as Host of the World Meeting of Families 2018 to make it a fully inclusive and welcoming event for all God's children and in particular those whom the Church has in the past contributed to marginalizing and excluding," she said in a statement.

But McAleese, a canon lawyer and prominent Irish Catholic, warned that the history of the event did not bode well in that regard. According to McAleese, LGBT Catholics and their families "who in good faith attended the 2015 Meeting held in Philadelphia reported that they experienced traumatizing hostility."

Marianne Duddy-Burke, DignityUSA executive director, who along with her spouse and their two adopted children, were among 22 people representing LGBT families at the 2015 World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, said the removal of the images from the "Amoris" booklet represented "an alarming and sad setback," while DignityUSA called the removal "a tragic denial of reality that increases the sense of unwelcome for LGBTQI people and our families in our church."

"We had all kinds of people coming up to us throughout the meeting," Duddy-Burke said, referring to her experience in Philadelphia. "There were parents of gay kids, aunts of transgender people, siblings, cousins, and grandparents of LGBTQI folks, even people who were staying with same-sex couples while they were attending WMF."

"Dozens of people came to sessions we held at night, after the official program ended. They were folks from all over the world," Duddy-Burke continued. "All of these people needed to talk about what they were hearing from the speakers, who mostly spoke very harshly against same-sex relationship and denied that people could be transgender or intersex. These are people who love their faith, and their family members, and were working hard to embrace both. What they heard was troubling to them."

Of the 'Amoris' booklet, Duddy-Burke said it had been "exciting to see images that reflected our families in the early materials. Having them deliberately deleted and

replaced with photos deemed more 'acceptable' is really hurtful. It feels like the welcome mat has been rolled up and put away — at least for us. It's hard to imagine Jesus being this unwelcoming."

Veritas, the publishers of "Amoris: Let's talk Family! Let's be Family!", is owned by the Irish bishops.

When questioned about the changes to the second edition of the booklet, Veritas spokesman Aidan Chester responded that the "Amoris" program was produced by the organizing committee of the World Meeting of Families and that queries relating to its content should be directed to that office.

A spokeswoman for the World Meeting of Families office did not explain why the images had been changed but said the event "has always been understood as a meeting open to all. This remains the position of the World Meeting of Families in Dublin."

She also quoted *Amoris Laetitia* where Francis stressed, "Every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration."

She added that the principal aim of the 2018 Dublin World Meeting of Families is to show how "the church makes her own the attitude of the Lord Jesus, who offers his boundless love to each person without exception."

But Irish theologian Angela Hanley questioned how "LGBT families can feel welcome when the very images of their existence are expunged from the literature as if they somehow contaminate it. If you cannot be visible, can you be counted?"

She believes restoring the original photographs in the booklet would be the only action that would have any meaning.

Anthony Murphy, co-founder of the Lumen Fidei Institute, a small conservative group which he describes as dedicated to "defending, promoting and teaching the Catholic faith," told NCR that his group had been "successful in having the image of two lesbians removed from the catechetical program for the World Meeting of Families."

"It is unfortunate we have to conduct these campaigns in the first place but it is also an indication of how deep the church in Ireland has been infiltrated by those who wish to impose a secular agenda upon it," Murphy said. "I am very encouraged by

the support we have on the ground and we are now in a good position to mount a fight back for authentic Catholic teaching."

In Hanley's opinion, the Irish Catholic Church leadership should not have been pressured into removing the image at the behest of Lumen Fidei.

They "had a chance to show some courage, not to say decency, and refuse to be browbeaten by a group whose vision of Catholicism is greatly impoverished," she said. "But they didn't, they caved in. Sadly, this action is only one more example of how a church that claims to be 'pro-life' is only 'pro' a certain type of life that fits a particular set of parameters."

The Association of Catholic Priests, which represents over 1,000 Irish priests, also waded into the controversy describing it in a statement as "unacceptable that individuals and associations can exert such undue influence and be allowed to do so much damage. Our Church is paying a high price in pandering to such extremes. In our efforts to reform the Church, we simply cannot afford such mixed signals."

The mixed signals may also refer to Martin's statement issued in response to the dispute over Cardinal Kevin Farrell of the Dicastery of Laity, Life and Family's attempt to block McAleese from speaking at the women's Voices of Faith conference on March 8.

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In his statement, Martin referred to the "Amoris" booklet, stating that he "has consistently noted that World Meeting of Families, due to take place in Dublin later this year, will be an inclusive event, open to all families and family members."

That statement drew fire from Brendan Butler of We Are Church, a lay reform group, who said the archbishop's assertion that the World Meeting of Families is open to all families did not explain why the image and text relating to LGBT couples was expunged.

"His statement is bland," Butler said. "I want him to mention explicitly that LGBT families will not alone be part of the World Meeting of Families, but will have pride of place to atone for their continuing cruel and heartless treatment at the hands of our official church."

He suspected that "interference" by Farrell, the Irish-born former bishop of Dallas, was the reason the booklet was "censored."

"We call upon Pope Francis not to remain aloof from these controversies but to speak out in defense of Mary McAleese and that LGBT families should have pride of place at the Dublin World Meeting of Families," Butler added.

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In Ireland, Maria Molloy, chairperson of AMACH!, an LGBT group, told NCR that excluding the diverse variations of families — including unmarried couples, single parents and same sex couples — that exist in Ireland and around the world "only serves to further alienate many in their church. By this exclusion, it may alienate these individuals' extended family also. It is a negative message and big loss for the Catholic Church."

Yet she still sounded a message of optimism, expressing the hope that "the Catholic Church will consider the reality of family life that exists in Ireland today and reflect this reality in all its diversity in the upcoming World Meeting of Families."

[Sarah Mac Donald is a freelance journalist based in Dublin, Ireland.]

This story appears in the **World Meeting of Families 2018** feature series. View the full series.
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