

MEDIA RELEASE

2nd February 2018

Rome, Italy

**Cardinal bars 8th President of Ireland and Ugandan LGBT advocate from International Women's Day event at The Vatican.**

Cardinal Kevin Farrell has stunned organisers of an annual International Women's Day (IWD) event to be held at The Vatican in March by barring the former President of Ireland, Mary McAleese and Catholic LGBT advocate as keynote speakers.

Ssenfuka Juanita Warry is a devout Catholic who runs a non profit organisation in Uganda, where to be identified as gay or lesbian can put your life at risk. Mary McAleese is no stranger to The Vatican having held the highest position in public office in a predominantly Catholic country. She is known for her staunch support for gay and women's rights and has often spoken publicly about her frustrations with her Catholic faith.

Dr McAleese said in an earlier promotion for the event, *"God gave us two wings so that humanity could soar to great heights and feel the power and see the beauty of his creation in all its wonder. Yet our Church insists on flying on one wing, overlooking and wasting the talents and insights of so many wonderful, faithful, Godly women. Why? Can this tragic dysfunction really be what God wants? I think not. Let us now begin to imagine a completely different future."*

2018 marks the fifth year of the only IWD event ever held at The Vatican. The event is coordinated and led by [Voices of Faith](#), an initiative that exists to empower and advocate for Catholic women to have a seat at the table of decision making in the Catholic Church. The most recent papers published by the Pew Research Centre on the changing religious landscape show a continuous decline in numbers of people identifying as Catholics, especially amongst young people.

Chantal Goetz, the Executive Director of [Voices of Faith](#) says this is true for a multitude of reasons but in particular a lack of vision on what the Catholic Church could be if only

women could participate, be heard and engage in dialogue right at the top of the Catholic Church's leadership structure.

*"It was disappointing to realise on IWD of all days, these women who have accomplished so much in their communities, could be turned away from respectfully sharing their stories and experiences as Catholics" says Ms Goetz. "This event allows us to not only celebrate the wonderful work Catholic women are doing across the globe, but also create discussion and dialogue on the current power and leadership structures of our Church today."*

Voices of Faith believe a key solution to many problems the Church is facing lies in having a diversity of thought, expertise and education at the leadership level, skill sets they say can be brought by women and lay people if only they were more welcomed into these structures.

In anticipation of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, to be held in Rome in October 2018, this year's IWD focused particularly on the work of young female leaders are doing across the globe to champion social justice issues and gender equality.

Cardinal Kevin Farrell is the Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. Voices of Faith is yet to receive an official explanation from the Cardinal regarding his decision.

For more information or to attend the Voices of Faith IWD event, or to organise a media pass, please go to [www.voicesoffaith.org](http://www.voicesoffaith.org)

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