

## **FutureChurch 2019 Trivison Award Acceptance and Presentation by Marie Collins**

### **Award Acceptance:**

Well, I really don't know how to respond to this because it is just amazing to be receiving this award and for you to feel that I'm a worthy recipient because I think you as an organization are doing wonderful work and Father Trivison was a pioneer in this whole area.

And to see people carrying on his, his legacy is wonderful and to receive this award is truly an honor. And I appreciate it so much and I want to thank everybody for it because it means a lot to me.

### **About Marie Collins and how she came to be on the Papal Commission for the Protection of Minors:**

As I think everybody who knows anything about me probably knows, a large portion of my life was sort of destroyed by being abused as a child. The best thing that ever happened to me then was having some therapy and, you know, the sun came out and, and my world changed. And I wanted that to be what happens for so many other survivors.

So, so many don't get help and they go on with a very difficult life. And so, it's very important to me first that others get the help I got and then children are kept safe, so the same thing doesn't happen to them. Their lives are not destroyed in the same way. And this is really what caused me to try and speak out and to challenge the way things were done in the church. And the way I saw the things going on, in covering up for abusers, allowing them to move around and continue to abuse. I wanted to see children kept safe and survivors treated in the way they should be treated – with respect and helped to heal rather than being treated as the enemy of the Church. I'm a Catholic and I remain a Catholic. It doesn't mean I can't challenge my church and that's why I've worked with the church over the years.

I have tried as much as possible to be constructive each time over the years that I agreed to work with the Church in different areas: in my diocese, in the local church, in Ireland. And then when I was asked to, to work with the church at Vatican level. I always hoped that having an input would be accepted. And I was sincere in offering anything I could bring to it. And I always hoped that there was the same sincerity in the acceptance of the help. And I went into the Pontifical Commission in that same way. I felt that here was a new body being set up to work to keep children safe. And if I, as a survivor with the various experiences I had over the years, if I could lend something positive to that work, then I must become involved.

I wasn't going in naively. I knew that there could be problems. I had come across them in the past, where sometimes the optics are more important than the actions. And I had no illusions that this might not be the case.

### **Her experience on the commission:**

I think everyone who went onto that commission with the same sincere wish to see change. And we worked very hard for it. But sadly, there were those in leadership in the Church -- in the Vatican -- who saw us as coming in to interfere with what they saw as their work. And despite the fact that many there were lay experts on that commission -- had years of work in the area of child abuse -- their voices were not listened to. And although the Pope himself accepted a lot of what we recommended, when it went to his departments to be implemented, they didn't implement the changes.

And in fact, in the first four years, none of the recommendations that the commission put forward were implemented. So, the commission was set up with a lot of fanfare. But when it came to the actual putting into practice what they recommended, it hasn't happened. And it was a deliberate act on behalf of some members of the Curia who thought more about retaining their own control and power and influence than supporting the commission. There were departments in the Vatican that would not cooperate with the commission, would not allow us to see documents . . . in fact, would just not cooperate with the work. And it was all politics. It wasn't anything to do with the safety of children, but unfortunately the safety of children is what suffered. And we weren't able to bring in what we had hoped we could. And I think that is the problem with some areas in the Church where so much is wrapped up in the power, the, the politics, the faction fighting. The goal of actually being good pastors and achieving what is really needed becomes secondary to personal power.

And we've seen that with some of the members of the hierarchy where power is corrupted and this is why we need change in the church. There are good men in the church, who are trying to change things, but they can't do it alone. They need the laity to become engaged and to challenge and to keep challenging until we get change. It won't happen by itself. It won't happen overnight.

And I'm afraid that some in the church at the moment are just not willing to change. They are content with the way things are. And it's become a failing church in many ways with so many people walking away. And if it's not to continue like that, we really, really have to have to work hard, insisting on change and not just sitting back expecting somebody else to do it. We have to do it ourselves.

**Two reforms that must happen:**

If there were two things I could get Pope Francis to actually do in this area, one was to bring in real accountability; to have a system if any of the leadership has not behaved as they should, has covered up for abuse or has been corrupted in any way -- financial, moral, whatever -- that they are brought to book under whatever system is being used. And that it should be transparent. We need to know who is investigating, who is judging, what the results of any investigation or trial are, and what the sanctions are. And if a bishop is being removed, he should not be allowed to walk away and just say it's on health grounds or something like that.

The laity, the people of the Church, are the Church. And I believe in many ways that there are those at the top who say that but don't believe it. But we must have transparency. We must see

justice being done, to know what is being done. Because moment we're told it's happening, but we have bishops judging bishops. And that just is not tenable. We have to have a proper system whereby we know exactly what's going on. And if someone's found guilty of something, it's not hidden. It's not kept secret to protect reputations. That just can't go on.

The second thing I'd would like to see is a universal safeguarding policy brought in for the entire Church. This would be a policy for holding children safe in every diocese in the world; a gold standard of reporting and also for caring for victims and survivors.

But this universal policy would be brought in and implemented in every single diocese in the world, not just on paper. There would have to be sanctions for not following it because it's not worth the paper it's written on if there are no sanctions. So it has to be a universal policy.

And I spoke to the Pope last August in Ireland and I put this to him and he said that he couldn't do it because there are so many different cultures in the world. I don't believe that's an argument that we can accept because in some cultures, things are acceptable -- women are second class citizens, things can be done to children -- that would never be accepted in other parts of the world. But just because there are cultural differences it's up to the Church to bring those cultures up to the standard, not to lower our standards.

And the argument I would make is we have Canon law, which the universal law of the church that is implemented in every diocese in the world. And if we can have universal Canon law applying to every priest in the world, then why can we not have universal standards of protection for every child in the world? There should be no difference between a child in Africa or a child in England or a child in France. It should be exactly the same. Every child has the same value as every other child and the continent they live on should not decide the level of protection they get. So as far as I'm concerned, universal protection is what we should have.

### **What gives her hope**

What gives me hope is that there are people in the clerical church who themselves see the need for change. They need support. If they didn't exist and if it was an entirely a dark story, it would be different. But I've come across many people in the church who give me great hope through the way they want change themselves. The problem is they tend not to be -- in many cases, not all cases -- men who get to the top in the church. Because, really to get to the top, you have to be very tow the line, be very Orthodox, do and say all the right things, don't rock the boat. And so, you don't get the most imaginative minds at the top. And you do need people that have an openness to change.

Sadly we see in the seminaries now the trend to be very, very conservative. These young men are coming out very conservative and the factions between conservative and liberal is tearing the Church apart. It's almost like Nero fiddles while Rome burns. You were arguing amongst ourselves on doctrinal matters, et cetera, while the people -- our attention is on the real issues.

So the question, to get back to the question you asked about hope: there are good people in the Church and there are good people in the laity who will work for change and seeing groups like yourselves working for change and willing to keep going against adversity, because it's not easy, and not giving up. That's the important thing because if we're to get change, if we're to get a new future, the only way we'll get it is continuing to speak out for it.

What I really want to say is keep up the good work and the more people there are working for change, the better chance we have for the church that we want to see in the future. And from my point of view, the safer children will be. And the people who have suffered will be treated, with kindness and empathy and some of the things we've seen in the recent past, we'll be able to put those behind, but only with good people working for it.