

Reform movement says canon law must be amended

"The way the bishops and local Churches have reacted to "Amoris Laetitia" has been an acid test for the Church's capacity to implement reforms."

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A Germany-based group that pushes for change in the Church has called on bishops to support Pope Francis' course of reform "far more consistently and above all jointly".

In a two-page statement on April 3 the group, "We Are Church", said the papal document on marriage and the family, *Amoris Laetitia*, had initiated the "long overdue paradigm shift on sexual ethics" and set in motion the discussion of issues that had long been stalled.

"This paradigm shift must now gain momentum so as not totally to dash the hopes of the great majority of Catholics that the Church's teaching and practice will be developed further," said We Are Church.

"The initial reception process is by no means finished yet, neither in the theological university faculties nor in church communities," the reform group said.

Pope Francis published *Amoris Laetitia* exactly one year ago (April 8, 2016). The apostolic exhortation embodies the discussion and conclusions reached over a three-year process that included two separate working sessions of the Synod of Bishops in 2014 and 2015.

The document has been criticized by some traditionalists, including four cardinals.

But We Are Church says Germany's bishops should ask themselves whether they are not to a great extent to be blamed for the inner-church altercations over *Amoris Laetitia* (AL).

The group says that is because the bishops did not publish their analysis of the exhortation until nine months after it appeared, even as two of the cardinals who openly opposed the pope by publishing their dubia (doubts) were retired German cardinals.

The We Are Church declaration lists a number of questions that, from the group's point of view, AL should have discussed.

For example, why does AL not go into the question of when marriage was declared a sacrament? Also, why is the 1968 encyclical *Humanae vitae*, which banned artificial contraception, not discussed in a differentiated way? And why is homosexuality only mentioned "in a very questionable and insufficient" way?

The reform group's declaration notes that Pope Francis has made it clear that not all doctrinal, moral or pastoral discussions in the Church must be decided by doctrinal intervention. And it applauds the pope for having "restored freedom of dialogue and the development of church teaching to the Church".

But We Are Church then laments that Francis has yet to consciously undertake any "obvious correction" of church teaching. It says the discrepancy between the Gospel message and canon law is becoming more and

more obvious, and therefore "canon law must be corrected".

The reform group insists that Amoris Laetitia must be deepened theologically and put into practice pastorally. It says the document should not be "discussed to death" or forgotten. The way the bishops and local Churches have reacted to AL, says the group, has been an acid test for the Church's capacity to implement reforms.

We Are Church was founded in Austria in 1995 as a result of the so-called "Groer Affair" when the then Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Hans Hermann Groer, was accused of abusing a minor.

At the time some 500,000 Catholics nationwide signed a grass roots "Church Referendum for Reform", which became the reform movement We Are Church and soon spread to other countries.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/reform-movement-says-canon-law-must-be-amended/4974>

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