

May 3, 2012

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) group, a survivor advocacy organization seeking an apology and redress from the Irish State and the Catholic Church involved in operating Ireland's ten Magdalene Laundries.

As part of a process to bring about restorative justice for survivors, our group is also involved in bringing evidence of State involvement with the Laundries to the attention of Senator Martin McAleese, the independent Chairperson of the government's Inter-Departmental Committee charged with creating a narrative that clarifies State interaction with these institutions.

As part of this process we have collected testimony from survivors, mostly aging and elderly women, who indicate that, historically, members of the Garda Siochana brought women to the Magdalene institutions and/or returned women into the nuns' care if they attempted escape.

I am writing to your organization to request that you solicit evidence from your membership and/or archives that confirms such interaction. For example, can retired members of the force recall instances when women were brought to and/or returned to a Magdalene convent? Are there any archival materials that might detail these actions, e.g., Garda Station logbooks? Would anyone in your organization be prepared to speak with JFM about such interaction? Would your organization be willing to make a general submission directly to Senator McAleese addressing such interaction?

Needless-to-say, we recognize the very sensitive nature of what we are asking for, and as an organization we appreciate the role that "context" plays in understanding historical events. JFM is committed to establishing the facts surrounding the Magdalene institutions. As such, I want to offer the following assurances:

(1) JFM is campaigning for an apology from the State and the Religious Orders and not from the Garda Siochana as a separate service.

(2) JFM is not seeking to hold individual Gardai responsible for what might have happened in the past.

(3) In particular, JFM is seeking to establish that Gardai returned women and girls to the Laundries in line with policies the State had adopted regarding use of the Laundries to deal with certain social issues at the time. Therefore the responsibility is that of the State and any apology should come from the State itself.

(4) Although the evidence JFM has already obtained does show that Gardai did return women and girls to the Laundries in line with the State's then policies, (a) the evidence we have so far seen shows that the women and girls were well-treated by individual Gardai whilst in their custody and (b) at least some Gardai allowed escaped women and girls time "to make it onto the ferry to England".

(5) JFM intends to make all of the above points in its submission to the Inter-Departmental Committee so as to clarify the relevance of the involvement of the Garda in returning women and girls to the Laundries. What we are seeking is further evidence which will show that Gardai sending or returning women and girls to the Laundries were doing so as part of a consistent policy, which can only have been one adopted centrally by the State, and was in no way a "local" practice adopted by individual Gardai acting contrary to their orders which the State can absolve itself of responsibility for.

If it helps, I am happy to meet with you in person to discuss the above. Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions or seek further clarification.

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Sincerely,

James M. Smith (electronic signature)

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Until June 30, 2012

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