

Letter to the Public Prosecutor handling the case of Elzbieta Podlesna, Joanna Gzyra-Iskandar and Anna Prus

Dear Mr Ziobro,

With this letter we would like to draw your special attention to the case of Elzbieta Podlesna, Joanna Gzyra-Iskandar and Anna Prus.

We are a group of Dutch Catholics who are very concerned about the fate of these three women.

The women have been charged with offending religious feelings after they created and distributed a poster of the Black Madonna with a rainbow-coloured halo, in response to an installation at a Catholic church in Płock, where LGBT people were portrayed in a bad light.

The charges against the three women are incomprehensible and downright shocking to us. We know of no more powerful symbol of compassion and protection than Mary. She stands for unconditional love: all people in need, young or old, male or female, rich or poor, LGBT or not, can turn to her to find comfort and support. After all, it is with good reason that she also bears the special name 'Our Lady of Refuge'.

Moreover, we believe that in depicting the Madonna with the rainbow halo, the three women have shown in a very powerful and beautiful manner how the Catholic Church should be loving and respectful towards LGBT people, and that it is precisely the task of the Catholic Church to also protect and support LGBT people when they are the victims of discrimination and marginalisation, and to offer them refuge.

Pope Francis also emphasised this recently in a letter (dated 21-6-2021) to an American fellow Jesuit, the American priest James Martin SJ. In this letter, he thanks Martin for his pastoral care of people from the LGBT community: 'I want to thank you for your pastoral zeal and your ability to be close to people, with the closeness that Jesus had, and which reflects the closeness of God. [...] You are a priest for all men and women [...]. I pray for you to continue in this way, being close, compassionate and with great tenderness.'

Now that the three women are again awaiting trial, after their previous acquittal in March, because you, as the Public Prosecutor, have filed an appeal against their acquittal, we would urge you to take the words of Pope Francis into consideration. It would seem to us that in making and distributing their poster of the Black Madonna, Elzbieta Podlesna, Joanna Gzyra-Iskandar and Anna Prus were acting in the spirit of the words of Pope Francis: out of compassion and tenderness.

Sincerely yours,

Henrike van Riel

Theo van Adrichem OFM, Provincial minister of the Dutch Franciscan friars

Harrie van den Akker, Chairman of Mariënborg, Association of Critical Catholics

Erik Borgman, Professor of Theology at the University of Tilburg and Lay Dominican

Frank Bosman, Researcher at Tilburg School of Catholic Theology

Frans Bossink, Chairman of the Association of Gay Catholic Ministers

Arjan Broers, Journalist, catholic minister, program maker and coach

Peter Denneman SMM, Provincial superior of the Dutch province of the Montfort Missionaries

René Dinklo OP, Provincial superior of the Dutch province of the Dominican order

Henk Erinkveld CSsR, Superior of the Redemptorist monastery Wittem

Wijbe Fransen OP, Dominican, Dominican Monastery Zwolle

Denis Hendrickx O.PRAEM., Norbertine and Abbot of the Abbey of Berne

Eric Holterhues, Theologian and banker

Tjeu van Knippenberg CM, Professor Emeritus of Theology

Gerard Mathijssen OSB, Benedictine monk and former abbot

Hendro Munsterman, Theologian and journalist

Bernardus Peeters OCSO, Abbot of the Trappist Abbey of Koningshoeven and President of KNR  
(umbrella organization of Dutch members of religious orders)

Jan-Jaap van Peperstraten, Priest

zr. Holkje van der Veer OP, Dominican sister of Neerbosch