



AMERICAN NATIONAL
CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Bishop George R. Lucey: ‘We are definitely Catholic but not Roman Catholic’

A Message of Hope and Inclusion

On behalf of the American National Catholic Church, I am taking this opportunity to respond to the June 22, 2011 statement by David M. O’Connell, Roman Catholic Bishop of Trenton, regarding the emergence of Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in Long Branch, N.J. as part of the American National Catholic Church.

The formation of Our Lady of Guadalupe was partly in response to the 2009 closing of St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church in Long Branch and actions by diocesan officials to have the police remove parishioners as would-be trespassers from their own church. The decision by these parishioners was also made to reclaim their identity anew as Our Lady of Guadalupe and join the American National Catholic Church.

While Bishop O’Connell characterizes the decision of Our Lady of Guadalupe parishioners as the action of “schismatic leaders,” and “false prophets,” the reality is otherwise. These actions are part of an international movement wherein legions of disaffected Roman Catholics are choosing to move beyond a top-down hierarchy mired in a worldwide sex abuse scandal and claim a unique Catholic identity apart from the Roman Church and responsive to their needs.

Equally amazing is the Bishop’s claim that “no Catholic church can be independent.” We reject the faulty construct that the Roman Catholic Church has the corner on all things catholic. Further, castigating the American National Catholic Church for perpetrating a charade to lead Long Branch parishioners “away from the true practice of the faith under



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the pretence of legitimacy” is an insult to the intelligence of these parishioners.

Following the Bishop’s reasoning, any Christian denomination not in lock-step allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church is “fractured,” “dangerous” and “schismatic.” This is not only inaccurate but undermines the tremendous work and positive gains of decades of ecumenical dialogue. While we share one common spiritual journey, clearly there are many paths.

While Bishop O’Connell intimates that independent Catholicism is a recent fad, we trace our origins to the 1850s solidified by a break from the Roman Church over papal infallibility. Independent Catholic Churches are Christian denominations with apostolic succession – continuous lineage directly from the Apostles – performing valid sacraments but not in union with the Vatican, nonetheless valid. Independent churches are worldwide and in nearly all languages.

We inherit and continue a rich tradition of grace-filled sacraments and a lived commitment to social action. In parishes and prisons, in hospitals and hospices, the American National Catholic Church is daily witnessing to the redeeming love of a welcoming God – a God whose love is beyond our wildest imagining.

We believe in a congregational or shared model of leadership where our parishioners join with locally-called clergy in discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit in the Church. This is decidedly different than the hierarchical model demanded by the Roman Catholic Church.

Like others in the Independent Catholic Tradition, the American National Catholic Church is built on the admonition of Christ to love one another. From this flows an inclusive ethic. For example:

- **Women Clergy:** We embrace the wonderful gifts of women. While the Roman Church recently removed an Australian Bishop for daring to even entertain questions regarding women’s ordination, we welcome the movement of God in the ordained ministry of women.
- **Married Clergy:** We welcome married clergy and know that their lived experience provides an invaluable gift for ministry. The



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Roman Church has forever closed the option of married clergy with its claim of divine intention.

- Divorce and Remarriage: We empathize with the pain of a failed marriage and receive our divorced and remarried brothers and sisters as full members into our Church. The Roman Church maintains that marriage is indissoluble.
- Family Planning: We support a couple's decision regarding family planning believing that they are in the best position to decide their most appropriate option. The Roman Church only permits natural family planning.
- Gays and Lesbians: We affirm the dignity and worth of our gay and lesbian members recognizing in them unique gifts particular to our time. We are honored to officiate at sacramental gay marriages. The Roman Church teaches that homosexuality is "objectively disordered" and all same-sex acts as sinful.

For even the most casual observer, there is no confusion between the American National Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Bishop O'Connell can rest easy.

We invite all who may be seeking a contemporary and inclusive expression of the best of an ancient Catholic tradition to find in the American National Catholic Church a welcoming home.

While we obviously disagree with Bishop O'Connell's characterization of the American National Catholic Church and our work at Our Lady of Guadalupe parish, we assure our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters of our prayers.

I leave you with the promise of unity so beautiful expressed by St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians:

"There is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus"

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend George R. Lucey, FCM



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