

March 15, 2025

President Katie Conboy
Saint Mary's College
Notre Dame, IN 46556

Re: We urge that the invitation to Mary McAleese as Commencement Speaker 2025 be rescinded as Dr. McAleese uses her influence to weaken the Church's moral authority

Dear President Conboy:

We, as Loretto Trust, representing alumnae, parents of students, students and faithful friends of Saint Mary's College, write to express our deep concern and strong objection to Saint Mary's College's decision to award an honorary degree to Mary McAleese, the former President of Ireland, who has also been invited to serve as this year's commencement speaker.

This decision directly contradicts the guidance of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), which states unequivocally that "Catholic institutions should not honor those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles" (*Catholics in Political Life*). The granting of this honor to Dr. McAleese not only defies this directive but sends a profoundly misleading message to graduates, students, and the broader Catholic community regarding the principles that Saint Mary's College upholds.

Mary McAleese's Record of Opposition to Catholic Teaching:

Despite holding a Doctorate in Canon Law from the Pontifical Gregorian University (2018) and professing to be a practicing Roman Catholic (*A Century of Women*), Dr. McAleese has been a vocal opponent of key Church teachings, including:

- **Abortion Access:** She has openly advocated for abortion rights in Ireland, publicly supporting the 2018 referendum that overturned Ireland's constitutional protection for the unborn (*Irish Independent*).
- **Same-Sex "Marriage":** She was a leading supporter of Ireland's 2015 referendum legalizing same-sex unions and has mocked the Church's stance on marriage and sexuality (*New Ways Ministry*).
- **Ordination of Women to the Priesthood:** She has repeatedly called for women to be admitted to the Catholic priesthood, directly challenging centuries of doctrinal teaching and papal authority (*Irish Times*).
- **Infant Baptism:** She has objected to infant baptism, referring to baptized children as "infant conscripts" and claiming that the practice disregards their personal autonomy and fundamental human rights. (*Irish Times*)

Dr. McAleese's hostility toward the Vatican has been public, openly declaring her intent to "spend her retirement challenging the Catholic Church," a mission she has pursued aggressively, particularly since earning her doctorate in canon law (*Crux*).

To bestow an honorary degree upon an individual who has so persistently and publicly attacked Catholic doctrine is an unambiguous betrayal of Saint Mary's College's Catholic

identity. It sends a scandalous message to students that one can actively oppose Church teachings while still being celebrated by a Catholic institution.

A Grave Scandal to the Catholic Faithful:

In analogous circumstances, other Catholic institutions have acted decisively to protect their Catholic integrity and avoid scandal caused by speakers with views that conflict with Church teachings. Catholic University of America terminated a psychology lecturer who hosted a speaker with views on life and gender that contradict Church teaching. The University of San Diego withdrew Tina Beattie's visiting fellowship due to her public dissent from the Church's moral teachings. An invitation to Father James Martin to speak at Theological College was rescinded due to views expressed in his book Building a Bridge. Additionally, The University of Notre Dame revoked honors previously granted to Theodore McCarrick, Bill Cosby, and Jean Vanier in response to publicized offenses.

Each of those cases reflected serious moral failings—yet no offense undermines Catholic identity more than a direct, intentional effort to distort and dismantle the Church's teachings from within.

By honoring Dr. McAleese, Saint Mary's College is elevating and endorsing someone who is using her influence to weaken the Church's moral authority and undermine the very foundation of Catholic doctrine.

Call to Action:

We respectfully urge Saint Mary's College to rescind this invitation to be commencement speaker and withdraw the honorary degree and thereby uphold its responsibility as a Catholic institution. The role of a Catholic college is not to provide a platform for those who reject and defy the faith, but to uphold, protect, and promote the truths of Catholic teaching.

Very truly yours,

Linda Shepard



Linda Van Eck Shepard, '84 - President
Monica Mastracco Dolenc, '08 - Secretary
Catherine Fenoglio Kelly, '81
Susan Powers, '81
Shannon Ferguson, Parent – Treasurer

Cc:

- Most Rev. Kevin C. Rhoades, Bishop of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.
- Sister Sharlet Ann Wagner., CSC. Congregational President, Sisters of the Holy Cross.
- Board of Trustees of Saint Mary's College