



DIOCESE OF MADISON  
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**Statement Directing Pastors and Rectors to Prohibit Individuals Associated with Wisdom's Well Interfaith Spirituality Center from Undertaking Activity at Parishes**

Dated: November 27, 2012

The Church has been sent on mission by Jesus Christ to proclaim the One God, revealed perfectly in the person of Jesus Christ, who was sent to draw all back into the love of the God whom He called 'Father.' It is for this work that God sent the Holy Spirit, in order to guide and protect the Church which continues to be sent forth in every age to proclaim the Eternal Word. The diocesan bishop is the "moderator of the entire ministry of the word" in his territory (c. 756 §2) and as such is to "take care that the prescripts of the canons on the ministry of the word...are carefully observed so that the whole Christian doctrine is handed on to all" (c. 386 §1). He is also to firmly protect that deposit of faith in its integrity and unity (c. 386 §2), exercising vigilance so that abuses do not creep into ecclesiastical discipline, especially regarding the ministry of the Word among other things (c. 392§2).

The pastor exercises pastoral care of his community under the authority of the diocesan bishop and carries out the *tria munera* (teaching, governing, sanctifying) for that community (c. 519). In fulfilling the *munus docendi* (to teach), the pastor is to see that the faithful receive adequate preaching and catechesis, to foster social justice, to have particular care for Catholic education, and to ensure that the Gospel is proclaimed to all, even those not professing the true faith (c. 528 §1).

On August 15, 2010, the Diocese of Madison Speaker Approval Policy was issued to assist pastors and those with pastoral authority in the Diocese of Madison to ensure that guest speakers who come to teach the Catholic faithful do so with fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church. As part of this review process for speakers, a situation of grave concern has arisen.

Wisdom's Well Interfaith Spirituality Center (hereinafter "Wisdom's Well"), is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization located in the Diocese of Madison. As evidenced mainly from its website, grave concern exists with regard to the teachings and animating spirit of the center, namely that the center and its members may espouse certain views flowing from New Ageism, panentheism, and indifferentism, and may not share an authentic view of the Catholic Church's approach to interreligious dialogue. These views are often associated with a spirit of relativism that can be an extreme result emanating from the "hermeneutic of rupture" as a misinterpretation of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. This misinterpretation has been explicitly disclaimed by papal teaching. The Office of the Vicar General, in conjunction with the Director of Communications, and under the authority of Most Reverend Robert C. Morlino, Bishop of Madison, has patiently monitored the situation of speakers associated with Wisdom's Well over the past years.

As concerns grew, the Diocese of Madison issued approvals for such speakers associated with Wisdom's Well with greater caveats (specifically, September 15, 2011). On September 22, 2011, the Office of the Vicar General directly and formally sought clarification from individuals associated with Wisdom's Well. The responses from these individuals proved insufficient and inconclusive to resolve the grave concerns.

Recently, further speaking events involving individuals associated with Wisdom's Well have been submitted for approval under the diocesan speaker approval policy. As the Vicar General, I confidentially consulted with

pastors involved with these submissions to seek their input and thoughts. I want to emphasize my gratitude to them for their cooperation and faithfulness in this matter. After careful deliberation with Bishop Morlino, and confidential notification to these same pastors with pending speaker-approval submissions, and in particular light of the need for clear catechesis during the *Year of Faith*, the following statement is given to all pastors and priests in the Diocese of Madison on behalf of Most Reverend Robert C. Morlino, Bishop of Madison.

**Until further notice, based upon ongoing investigation into this matter of grave concern, any past, present, or future staff or members of Wisdom’s Well Interfaith Spirituality Center, including at this time, Paula Hirschboeck, Ph.D., Sr. Maureen McDonnell, O.P., Sr. Lynn Lisbeth, O.P. and Ms. Beth O’Brien, Oblate of Holy Wisdom Monastery, are not to be invited or allowed to preach, catechize, lead spiritual or prayer instructions or exercises, or to provide spiritual direction or guidance at churches, oratories, or chapels within the Diocese of Madison, whether as individuals or as official representatives of Wisdom’s Well Interfaith Spirituality Center.** This includes, but is not limited to, all parish church property or any type of parish sponsorship. No stand-alone or collaborative programs, workshops, series, panel participation, or moderation of fora involving Wisdom’s Well members, past, present, or future may be held, distributed, or shown until further notice. Any existing events of these individuals should be cancelled or modified so the above individuals are not involved. The aforementioned speakers will not be approved under the Diocese of Madison Speaker Approval Policy until further notice.

No distribution of materials of whatever media for Wisdom’s Well or its individual past, present, or future members, is allowed at parishes, churches, oratories, or chapels within the Diocese of Madison until further notice. No advertisements on parish property or in parish bulletins for any of the above items are allowed until further notice. This includes, but is not limited to, advertisements for Centering Prayer by any of the individuals named above. Centering Prayer is a type of contemplative prayer, yet contemplative prayer is a charism usually only given to those advanced in the spiritual life, and in the absence of sound spiritual direction accompanied by orthodox doctrine, attempting contemplative prayer can be counterproductive and even seriously harmful.

**For your confidential information, and to help acquaint you with the gravity of this matter, I am attaching to this statement a synopsis of some of the items that have arisen mainly from the Wisdom’s Well website that have given rise to grave concerns and that require this statement to protect the public order while further investigation ensues, and in which the bishop asks for the cooperation of pastors in the Diocese of Madison.** I ask for your confidentiality regarding this statement and any associated materials. Thank you for your assistance. Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us.

Sincerely in Christ,



Msgr. James Bartylla  
Vicar General, Diocese of Madison

Enclosure: *Synopsis of Concerns regarding Sr. Maureen McDonnell, O.P., Sr. Lynn Lisbeth, O.P. Paula Hirschboeck, Ph.D., and Ms. Beth O’Brien (oblate of Holy Wisdom Monastery) and their Formal Associations*