

Letter also to Mr Peter Barry TD
Mr Tom King M.P.
N. Ireland Office

Parochial House
Armagh
22 November 1985

Dear Secretary of State,

On Thursday morning 21 November 1985 while having a spiritual visit with a parishioner, _____, in the visiting box of the Maze Prison (cellular Maze), where the door is closed, - my visit was interrupted by an officer who told us to stop speaking Irish. He said this was the order of the Principal Officer. Both priest and parishioner were astounded. We continued the visit in English and I conducted my next visit with _____, also a parishioner who is fluent in Irish and wished to speak Irish, in English. After the second visit I asked to see the Principal Officer and pointed out that I regarded this as an infringement of freedom of conscience and cultural rights. He told me that he had phoned the governor who had confirmed to him that my spiritual visit would have to be conducted in English. The Principal officer referred to the Irish language as a foreign language.

I find this an extraordinary situation. I often conduct Mass and parts of the Mass in Irish in Armagh Prison...and so has Cardinal O Fiaich as late as this very month - and other spiritual matters. Did the governor in the Maze really confirm this? if he did could you clarify the situation of confidential spiritual visits in Irish in the Maze prison - are they permissible or not? If they are please see that this ruling is made clear to the staff; otherwise it leaves the situation open to accusations of pure bigotry against Catholics.

beir beannacht

le gach deaghu: _____

Fr Raymond Murray