

# **Ireland cracks down on Mass-card abuses at newsstands**

DUBLIN, Ireland – The Irish government is clamping down on the sale of pre-signed Mass cards at newsstands and by other vendors.

Under new measures announced by the government July 29 under the Charities Act 2009, the cards can be sold only where there is an arrangement in place with a local bishop or with the provincial of a religious order.

The new provision will allow the public to immediately determine if the vendor has an agreement with the church to sell such cards, Minister of State John Curran said in a statement.

“The sale of pre-signed Mass cards in shops, as opposed to directly from the Catholic Church, has been a matter of public concern for some time,” Curran said. “The concerns are twofold. One, will a Mass actually be offered in respect of the specific intentions offered? Two, is there an element of profit behind the sale of such cards?”

“A Mass card is purchased in good faith, and often at times of great sorrow, to demonstrate a person’s empathy and concern for others. It is an inherently decent act. I believe people in such circumstances should have no doubt whatsoever that a Mass will be offered for their intentions,” he added.

“It is not my intention to stymie the sale of genuine Mass cards, but to enhance public confidence and to ensure that people’s good faith is not taken advantage of,” he said.

Thousands of pre-signed Mass cards, often bearing the printed signature of an African or Indian missionary priest thousands of miles from Ireland, are sold each year by various vendors, something that has concerned the church for more than a decade.

Bishop Colm O’Reilly of Ardagh and Clonmacnois welcomed Mass-card regulation in a July 30 interview with Catholic News Service.

“I don’t like to use the word scam in relation to the selling of pre-signed cards, because I don’t want to make people who bought the cards feel guilty that they have done something wrong, but many of the cards that have been sold are not authentic,” he said. “My biggest problem with the sale of pre-signed Mass cards is that it is disrespectful of the profound meaning we have in the Eucharist.”