

Catholic priest in Netherlands denies he's trying to pressure people to stay in the Church

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After a rush by Catholics in the Netherlands to resign from the Church, a priest, Harm Schilder (right), is putting up the names and photographs of parish members who are attempting to leave "as an encouragement for them to stay".

Schilder said: "This is a large parish, and I don't know everyone: by putting up the photos I thought someone might recognise someone they know who they could try to make stay in the Church."

Mr Schilder denied that it was a form of blackmail. He said: "This isn't about pointing a finger, naming and shaming"; he intended for the community to pray for the people attempting to leave the church and to "persuade them to stay."

Members of the church wishing to leave are required to send a letter to their priest along with a photocopy of their identity papers. It is photographs from these documents that will be displayed in the entrance porch to Schilder's church in the southern city of Tilburg.

Last December, Tom Roes, who runs the website aimed at helping people leave the church, said visits to his site had gone from 10 a day to 10,000 after the pope made a particularly vicious anti-gay speech. He said: "Of course it's not possible to be 'de-baptised' because a baptism is an event, but this way people can unsubscribe or deregister themselves as Catholics."

Mr Schilder said he had received four requests from people wishing to leave the church over the Christmas period.

Around 28% of the Dutch population is Catholic, while roughly 44% is not religious

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