

20/3/10 Statement by Archbishop Martin

PASTORAL LETTER OF POPE BENEDICT XVI TO THE CATHOLICS OF IRELAND

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin welcomes the Pastoral Letter of Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland. He described the Letter not as a final word but as “a further step in the process of renewal and healing in the Catholic Church in Ireland following the crisis of the sexual abuse of children within the Church in Ireland. I welcome the Pope’s expression of apology and his recognition of the suffering and betrayal experienced by survivors. The Pope recognizes the failures of Church authorities in how they dealt with sinful and criminal acts”.

Background to the Letter

The Pope’s Pastoral Letter is a letter addressed to the Catholic faith community in Ireland. He has asked believers to read it prayerfully and reflect on it and indicates some spiritual measures which the entire Church community can undertake.

- The Pope recognizes the grievous suffering of victims and says the he is truly sorry: “your trust has been betrayed and your dignity has been violated”.
- The Letter is not a general commentary on the phenomenon of child sexual abuse within the Church.
- The Pastoral Letter is part of a broader and on-going programme and strategy for renewal of the Catholic Church in Ireland following the scandals of the sexual abuse of children by priests and in Catholic institutions.
- The Pope recognizes that the crisis of healing and renewal cannot be resolved swiftly. The Pastoral Letter is not the final word.
- The Letter is not a new strategy for dealing with child sexual abuse. The Pope reaffirms and commends the measures that are currently in place within the Catholic Church in Ireland to deal with the problem.
- The Pope announces two further steps in his strategy for renewal of the Catholic Church in Ireland:

- An Apostolic Visitation of certain dioceses, of religious life and of seminary formation.
- A Mission of spiritual renewal for all Bishops, religious and priests.

Some Key Messages from Pope's Letter

(The numbers refer to paragraphs in the original letter)

1. "I can only share in the dismay and the sense of betrayal that so many of you have experienced on learning of these sinful and criminal acts and the way Church authorities in Ireland dealt with them."
6. "*To the victims of abuse and their families* -- you have suffered grievously and I am truly sorry. I know that nothing can undo the wrong you have endured"
6. "Your trust has been betrayed and your dignity has been violated"
6. "Many of you found that when you were courageous enough to speak of what happened to you no one would listen"
6. "I know some of you find it difficult even to enter the doors of a Church after all that has occurred".
6. "Those of you who were abused in residential institutions must have felt that there was no escape from your sufferings. It is understandable that you find it hard to forgive or be reconciled with the Church".
5. "On several occasions since my election to the See of Peter, I have met with victims of abuse, as indeed I am ready to do in the future."
2. "The Church in Ireland must first acknowledge before the Lord and before others the serious sins committed against defenceless children. Such an acknowledgement, accompanied by sincere sorrow for the damage caused to these victims and their families must lead to a concerted effort to ensure the protection of children from similar crimes in the future".
2. "No one imagines that this painful situation will be resolved swiftly."
7. "God's justice summons us to give an account of our actions and to conceal nothing"

11. “*To my brother bishops:* It cannot be denied that some of you and your predecessors failed, at times grievously, to apply the long-established norms of canon law to the crime of child abuse... It must be admitted that grave errors of judgment were made and failures of leadership occurred.

2. “The task you now face is to address the problem of abuse that has occurred within the Irish Catholic community, and to do so with courage and determination. No one imagines that this painful situation will be resolved swiftly.”

11. “Only decisive action carried out with complete honesty and transparency will restore the respect and good will of the Irish people towards the church to which we have consecrated our lives”

11. “Besides fully implementing the norms of canon law in addressing cases of child abuse, continue to cooperate with the civil authorities in their areas of competence”.

4. “Certainly, among the contributing factors we can include: inadequate procedures for determining the suitability of candidates for the priesthood and the religious life; insufficient human, moral, intellectual and spiritual formation in seminaries and novitiates; a tendency in society to favour the clergy and other authority figures; and a misplaced concern for the reputation of the Church and the avoidance of scandal, resulting in failure to apply existing canonical penalties and to safeguard the dignity of every person.”

10. “I am also aware that in some people’s eyes [priests] are tainted by association, and viewed as if you were somehow responsible for the misdeeds of others. At this painful time I wish to acknowledge the dedication of your priestly and religious lives and apostolates.

14. “While no effort should be spared in improving and updating existing procedures, I am encouraged by the fact that the current safeguarding procedures adopted by local Churches are being seen in some parts of the world as a model for other institutions to follow”.

14. “I take this opportunity to thank... the many men and women throughout Ireland already working for the safety of children in church environments”.