

Response to frequently asked media questions
Catholic Communications Office – March 2010

1. *Why has Pope Benedict XVI written a Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland?*

A Pastoral Letter is an open letter to the faithful, based on Gospel values, and which addresses a particular pastoral situation. The “Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland”, published on 19 March 2010, focuses on the abuse of children by some priests and religious. Pope Benedict specifically identifies particular groups within Irish society in order to tailor his message to them. Pope Benedict addresses victims of abuse and their families to which he says “You have suffered grievously and I am truly sorry.” In addition he indicates some initiatives to address the grave situation facing the Church here.

2. *Does the Holy Father believe that a general lack of faith caused abuse?*

No. The problem of child sexual abuse has contributed in no small measure to the weakening of faith and the loss of respect for the Church and her teachings.

3. *Does the 2001 Letter 'De delictis gravioribus' [On grave crimes] support a cover up of abuse?*

No. In Church law the crime of the sexual abuse of minors has always been considered as one of the most serious of all. This is emphasised in the 2001 Letter, sometimes improperly cited as the cause of a 'culture of silence'. This letter was a decisive signal to remind bishops of the seriousness of the problem, as well as providing a real incentive to draw up operational guidelines to deal with abuse.

During the two day meeting in Rome in February 2010 between Pope Benedict and the Irish bishops, it was made clear that the 2001 Letter in no way precluded Church authorities from their civil obligations especially in regards to reporting and cooperating fully with the civil authorities.

4. *Does Pope Benedict XVI view child abuse by clergy uniquely as an Irish problem?*

No. In his Pastoral Letter the Holy Father says “that the problem of child abuse is peculiar neither to Ireland nor to the Church”.

5. *Has Pope Benedict XVI met with survivors?*

On several occasions Pope Benedict has met with survivors of abuse “and listened to their stories and acknowledged their suffering”. The Holy Father has expressed his readiness to meet with victims of sexual abuse in the future.

6. *What does Pope Benedict mean by renewal in his Pastoral Letter?*

Pope Benedict says “I have decided to write this Pastoral Letter to express my closeness to you and to propose a path of healing, renewal and reparation.” Church renewal is essentially a return to the values of the Gospel with a view to reinvigorating the commitment and life of everyone in the Church.

7. *How are the costs associated with sexual abuse met by dioceses?*

This is a matter for decision by individual diocesan bishops in their respective dioceses in consultation with their finance committees and the lay faithful.

8. *How is leadership in the Church reaching out to survivors of abuse?*

At local level, bishops and leaders of religious congregations meet with survivors of abuse. This involves offering support through counselling initiatives and includes exploring ways to bring about healing. In addition, in October 2009, a group of bishops was tasked, by the Irish Bishops' Conference, to seek and identify how the Church might engage in an ongoing way with survivors.

9. *Are children safe in the Church today?*

The Church's *Safeguarding and Guidance Policy and Procedures* in operation today is in keeping with civil obligations in this area and reflects current best practice in safeguarding children. There are also hundreds of child protection trained people in parishes throughout Ireland. The main aims of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church (www.safeguarding.ie) are:

- to offer advice on best practice
- to assist in the development safeguarding policy, procedures and practice
- to monitor practice in relation to safeguarding children.