



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX

Statement by the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales

Child abuse in the Catholic Church has been such a focus of public attention recently, that we, the Bishops of England and Wales, wish to address this issue directly and unambiguously.

Catholics are members of a single universal body. These terrible crimes, and the inadequate response by some church leaders, grieve us all.

Our first thoughts are for all who have suffered from the horror of these crimes, which inflict such severe and lasting wounds. They are uppermost in our prayer. The distress we feel at what has happened is nothing in comparison with the suffering of those who have been abused.

The criminal offences committed by some priests and religious are a profound scandal. They bring deep shame to the whole church. But shame is not enough. The abuse of children is a grievous sin against God. Therefore we focus not on shame but on our sorrow for these sins. They are the personal sins of only a very few. But we are bound together in the Body of Christ and, therefore, their sins touch us all.

We express our heartfelt apology and deep sorrow to those who have suffered abuse, those who have felt ignored, disbelieved or betrayed. We ask their pardon, and the pardon of God for these terrible deeds done in our midst. There can be no excuses.

Furthermore, we recognise the failings of some bishops and religious leaders in handling these matters. These, too, are aspects of this tragedy which we deeply regret and for which we apologise. The procedures now in place in our countries highlight what should have been done straightaway in the past. Full co-operation with statutory bodies is essential.

Now, we believe, is a time for deep prayer of reparation and atonement. We invite Catholics in England and Wales to make the four Fridays in May 2010 special days of prayer. Even when we are lost for words, we can place ourselves in silent prayer. We invite Catholics on these days to come before the Blessed Sacrament in our parishes to pray to God for healing, forgiveness and a renewed dedication. We pray for all who have suffered abuse; for those who mishandled these matters and added to the suffering of those affected. From this prayer we do not exclude those who have committed these sins of abuse. They have a journey of repentance and atonement to make.

We pray also for Pope Benedict, whose wise and courageous leadership is so important for the Church at this time.

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In our dioceses we will continue to make every effort, working with our safeguarding commissions, to identify any further steps we can take, especially concerning the care of those who have suffered abuse, including anyone yet to come forward with their account of their painful and wounded past. We are committed to continuing the work of safeguarding, and are determined to maintain openness and transparency, in close co-operation with the statutory authorities in our countries. We thank the thousands who give generously of their time and effort to the Church's safeguarding work in our parishes and dioceses.

We commit ourselves afresh to the service of children, young people and the vulnerable in our communities. We have faith and hope in the future. The Catholic Church abounds in people, both laity, religious and clergy, of great dedication, energy and generosity who serve in parishes, schools, youth ventures and the care of elderly people. We also thank them. The Holy Spirit guides us to sorrow and repentance, to a firm determination to better ways, and to a renewal of love and generosity towards all in need.

22 APRIL 2010