

# Spokesman says pope not planning changes to church laws on abuse

NEW YORK – Pope Benedict XVI is not planning any new changes to church law in response to the clerical sexual abuse crisis, said Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman.

Father Lombardi spoke April 19 after The New York Times ran a front-page story reporting that U.S. Cardinal William J. Levada, head of the Vatican's doctrinal congregation, had said the Vatican was considering further revisions to church norms.

Father Lombardi said that, after the cardinal read the Times story, "Cardinal Levada told me they had not understood him. The changes already have been made.

"He did not intend to announce any changes, but he explained the norms that were put into effect recently for cases of sexual abuse," Father Lombardi said. "Further changes are not expected."

The Times' headline said, "Vatican hints at changes in church law on abuse," and added, "Statute of limitations is seen as key issue as Benedict focuses on scandal."

The story said Cardinal Levada's remarks "came in response to three reporters as he left a luncheon in New York given by Time magazine."

"Cardinal William J. Levada would not specify which canons were under reconsideration. But he suggested that they related to the church's statute of limitations, saying that his office has frequently had to judge allegations from years before because the victims 'don't feel personally able to come forward' until they are more mature," the newspaper said.

But Father Lombardi said, "The norms he was speaking about are already in vigor. It is not that he announced coming changes."

Under current church law the time limit for prosecuting the crime of clerical sexual

abuse of a minor runs out 10 years after the victim reaches his or her 18th birthday.

However, in 2002 Pope John Paul II gave the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith - then headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict - power to waive the statute of limitations on a case-by-case basis.