

Vatican to publish advice on guidelines to prevent, respond to abuse

VATICAN CITY - The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has written a circular letter to bishops' conferences around the world on preparing policies and guidelines for dealing with cases of clerical sexual abuse of minors.

The Vatican press office announced May 11 that it would release the text of the letter May 16.

U.S. Cardinal William J. Levada, prefect of the doctrinal congregation, announced in November that his office, which coordinates the church's response to abuse cases, was preparing the document. He said it would help every bishops' conference in the world design a "coordinated and effective program" of child protection and of dealing with allegations.

The cardinal's announcement about the letter came during a presentation to Pope Benedict XVI and to members of the College of Cardinals. According to a Vatican statement at the time, Cardinal Levada's presentation included the Vatican's conviction that church leaders should collaborate with local law enforcement investigating abuse cases.

A Vatican official told Catholic News Service in November that the circular letter to bishops' conferences would encourage reporting accusations to civil authorities but would not mandate reporting because in some countries, just an accusation could prompt violence against a priest.

In November, the Vatican also said that during the discussion after Cardinal Levada's presentation, bishops' conferences were encouraged to develop "effective, quick, articulated, complete and decisive plans for the protection of children" and that those plans should look toward bringing perpetrators to justice and assisting victims, "including in countries where the problem has not manifested itself in as

dramatic a way as in others.”