

# **Year in Review: New abuse reports in 2010 led pope, Vatican to refine policies**

VATICAN CITY - New revelations about clerical sex abuse cases, particularly in Europe, led Pope Benedict XVI and his top aides in 2010 to look for ways to refine policies for handling accusations and strengthening child protection programs.

In a pastoral letter to Catholics in Ireland, at a Mass marking the end of the Year for Priests, in speeches and in meetings with victims of abuse in Malta and in Great Britain, Pope Benedict acknowledged the horror of abuse and the shame of a slow church response.

As 2010 drew to a close, he called the College of Cardinals to a meeting at the Vatican where the church's response to the scandal was one of the topics and where U.S. Cardinal William J. Levada, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, announced the Vatican was working on new guidelines to ensure a "coordinated and effective program" for dealing with accusations and protecting children.

The Vatican and leaders of the Catholic Church in Ireland began the year trying to respond to a late 2009 report about the failures of the church in handling cases of abuse; soon afterward Belgian Bishop Roger Vangheluwe of Brugge was forced to resign when his family revealed he had sexually abused his nephew. Cases of abuse also were revealed in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands.

Closing the Year for Priests in June, the pope said that what had been planned as a year of celebration became a "summons to purification."

"In this very year of joy for the sacrament of the priesthood, the sins of priests came to light - particularly the abuse of the little ones, in which the priesthood, whose task is to manifest God's concern for our good, turns into its very opposite," the pope said in a homily during a Mass June 11 with about 15,000 priests.

Pope Benedict's approach to the scandal consistently has been to see it as a result of serious sin that has polluted the church; the process of cleansing must be serious and profound, he has said, but it also must acknowledge Christ's power to heal and to strengthen the church.

In his letter to the Catholics of Ireland, released March 20, the pope wrote directly to the victims of abuse: "You have suffered grievously and I am truly sorry. I know that nothing can undo the wrong you have endured. Your trust has been betrayed and your dignity has been violated."

He ordered an apostolic visitation of Ireland's four archdioceses, its seminaries and its religious orders. The visits, being conducted by church leaders from the United States, Canada and England, began in November and were to conclude by Easter 2011.

As revelations of abuse hit the news in various parts of Europe, the Vatican faced the task not only of strengthening procedures to deal with the abuse, but also of explaining to the public what the church already had done over the previous 10 years to help victims and to expel abusers from the priesthood.

In April, it posted on the Vatican website a summary of the investigative steps, trial options and possible penalties for clerical sex abuse of minors, including dismissal from the priesthood. The summary underlines the local bishop's responsibility to follow civil law in reporting such crimes to the appropriate authorities. By the end of the year, the web page - "Abuse of Minors. The Church's Response" - contained dozens of documents and papal speeches addressing the scandal.

The crisis even was one of the topics covered by Peter Seewald in "Light of the World," a book-length interview with Pope Benedict.

The pope told Seewald that the crisis "was really almost like the crater of a volcano, out of which suddenly a tremendous cloud of filth came, darkening and soiling everything, so that above all the priesthood suddenly seemed to be a place of shame."