

A Message from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan

On the Occasion of Instituting a Day of Prayer and Penance for the Victims of Sexual Abuses

To all the Catholics in Japan,

Foreword

Pope Francis has called on episcopal conferences throughout the world to institute a Day of Prayer and Penance for the victims of sexual abuse. Here in Japan, that Day will be the second Friday of Lent.

The first such Day of Prayer will be Friday, March 17, 2017. Prior to that, we bishops of Japan will gather during our General Plenary Assembly in February and celebrate a Mass with the intention of healing and penance for the victims of sexual abuse.

Marking the Day of Prayer and Penance on a Lenten Friday is appropriate to conversion and at the same time symbolic. We ask that in response to the call of the bishops you create opportunities during Lent or on Sundays near Lent for prayer and penance, and to learn the pain of the victims.

Pope Francis' intention

Following reports in 2002 of sexual abuse of children by clergy in the Archdiocese of Boston in the United States, similar cases were exposed in many parts of the world.

Pope Francis has set up a new Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, showing his commitment to deal with this problem seriously and encouraging the Church throughout the world to honestly face this situation. In addition, he has asked all the episcopal conferences in the world to be clearly aware of the responsibility of the members of the Church towards minors, and called for a Day of Prayer and Penance to be instituted to pray to God for the victims of sexual abuse.

The Pope's intention is summarized in the following points:

1. Imploring from God pardon for sins of sexual abuse committed against minors by members of the Church, as well as in the family and educational contexts;
2. Making an act of public acknowledgement of these grave crimes perpetrated by the members of the Church;
3. Asking God's forgiveness for Church authorities' covering up for perpetrators of abuse and ignoring the pain of victims;
4. Imploring the grace of recognizing, as the members of the Church, everyone's responsibility to care for victims;
5. Begging from the Lord divine consolation and assistance for the victims and for their families, and the grace of a fruitful accompaniment on the part of the Church on the path of interior healing and reconciliation;
6. Answering promptly and with special pastoral sensitivity anyone who reports abuse.

Acting as the bishops of Japan

We bishops of Japan conducted an investigation in 2002 of sexual abuse of children by clergy and religious. As a result, we found that similar incidents had occurred in Japan. Accepting this fact, we took steps and published a message.

In June 2002, we issued “Concerning the Sexual Abuse of Minors.” In that message, we declared that, “To abuse a defenseless child, wounding it physically and psychologically, is an appalling crime. ... It is our sad duty to report that upon investigation we have found in the Japanese Church as well incidents of child abuse among priests and religious. Concerning this problem we must confess that we have not adequately fulfilled our responsibility. To those who have been harmed we promise now that we bishops will respond to the problem in all sincerity, and that any priests or religious who are guilty will be dealt with severely. ... We shall spare no effort in training priests, religious and all who labor in schools and institutes devoted to the rearing and education of children.” We promised as well to correct ourselves and devote ourselves to bringing about change in the Church so that such incidents would not recur.

As a follow-up, “Guidelines for Bishops Concerning the Church’s Measures for the Protection of Minors against Child Abuse Cases Perpetrated by Clerics” was prepared and approved during the bishops’ Extraordinary Plenary Assembly in February 2003, and the Protection of the Human Rights of Women and Children Desk was established to promote concrete efforts and educational activities. In February 2013, “The Church’s Measures for the Protection of Children’s Rights: A Manual for Dealing with Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minors Perpetrated by Clerics” was issued as a supplement to the Guidelines for Bishops.

We will continue to prepare and organize in each diocese a system to deal with the problem. We will spare no effort in training priests and seminarians to enhance their awareness of the sexual abuse of minors. And we will promote awareness among the members of the Church.

Afterword

And now let us pray with all Christians that we might understand the sorrow and suffering of the victims. Let us beg our merciful God for their healing and restoration, and for the grace and power of God so that all the Churches in the world will overcome this difficult situation. With clergy, religious and all the faithful, we bishops of Japan will renew ourselves and the Church here so that this sort of thing will never happen again.

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