

Summary of the Findings of the Apostolic Visitation in Ireland

Now that the Apostolic Visitation to certain Dioceses, Seminaries and Religious Institutes in Ireland has been concluded, it is intended here, in accordance with what was stated in the Communiqué of 6 June 2011, to offer an overall synthesis indicating the results and the future prospects highlighted by the Visitation.

It should be borne in mind that the Visitation was pastoral in nature; the Holy Father's intention was that it should "assist the local Church on her path of renewal" (*Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland*, 19 March 2010). It was not intended to replace or supersede the ordinary responsibility of Bishops and Religious Superiors, nor to interfere "with the ordinary activity of the local magistrates, nor with the activity of the Commissions of Investigation established by the Irish Parliament, nor with the work of any legislative authority, which has competence in the area of prevention of abuse of minors" (*Communiqué of the Holy See Press Office*, 12 November 2010).

In communicating this summary of the Findings of the Apostolic Visitation, the Holy See re-echoes the sense of dismay and betrayal which the Holy Father expressed in his *Letter to the Catholics of Ireland* regarding the sinful and criminal acts that were at the root of this particular crisis.

The Visitation to the Dioceses was carried out in the four Metropolitan Sees during the first few months of 2011. The four Visitators, accompanied by qualified and authorized persons and in coordination with the Archbishops of the Sees concerned, met individuals from the various categories listed in the Communiqué of 12 November 2010, along with others who requested a hearing, including representatives of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church. Special priority was given to the meetings with victims of abuse, who were assured of the particular closeness of the Holy Father. Some of the Archdioceses held very moving penitential liturgies in the Cathedrals, attended by clergy and members of the faithful, with the participation of victims of abuse in each case. These four Visitations included meetings with the suffragan Bishops and yielded sufficient information to provide an adequate picture of the situation of the Church in Ireland, such as to obviate the need to extend the Visitation to the suffragan Sees.

The Visitation to the Seminaries examined the situation of four Institutes: the Pontifical Irish College in Rome, Saint Malachy's College in Belfast, and two Institutes in the Archdiocese of Dublin – the National Seminary, Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth, and the Milltown Institute of the Society of Jesus. All Hallows College in Dublin informed the Visitator that it no longer offered a programme of priestly formation and consequently it was not included in the Visitation. Before visiting each of the Institutes, the Visitator was able to study documentation on the Colleges concerned. Upon arrival, with the assistance of several Bishops and priests, all previously approved by the Congregation for Catholic Education, the Visitator examined, to the extent possible, all aspects of priestly formation, along the lines indicated in the Press Communiqué of 31 May 2010. The Visitator and his assistants held individual meetings with formators and seminarians, as well as others holding positions of authority in the seminaries, including those responsible for the protection of minors. Priests ordained within the last three years were also invited to a personal conversation if they so wished. It should be pointed out that the Milltown

Institute, which is more an academic centre than a seminary, was examined only with regard to the theological formation offered to future priests.

The Visitation to the Religious Institutes took place after careful study of the responses to the questionnaire that was sent to all Institutes with Religious houses in Ireland. The questionnaire sought to elicit information on the current safeguarding measures and policies adopted by each Institute and the effect of the present crisis on the Institute's members. The Visitors then held various meetings with Bishops, Superiors and formators of the different communities and with any particular groups, including abuse victims, that requested a meeting, as well as representatives of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church. Meetings were held with the members of the Conference of Religious of Ireland, both in the common assemblies and in regional assemblies throughout the country. The Visitors had the opportunity to conduct extended visits to 31 Institutes. They estimate that, during the visit, they had the opportunity to dialogue with a significant portion of Religious in Ireland.

With a view to promoting the work of renewal called for by the Holy Father, the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for Catholic Education have carefully studied the information collected by the respective Visitors. Keeping in mind the provisions of the document *Towards Healing and Renewal* issued by the Irish Episcopal Conference, they have communicated their conclusions to the four Metropolitan Archbishops and to the Ecclesiastical Authorities of the seminaries visited, indicating courses of action. The Archbishops and the Ecclesiastical Authorities gave their responses. The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life is likewise forwarding its conclusions to the Superiors of all Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life with houses in Ireland. A Summary Report will also be presented to the Apostolic Nuncio to be shared with the Bishops of Ireland.

During their stay in Ireland, the Visitors were able themselves to see just how much the shortcomings of the past gave rise to an inadequate understanding of and reaction to the terrible phenomenon of the abuse of minors, not least on the part of various Bishops and Religious Superiors. With a great sense of pain and shame, it must be acknowledged that within the Christian community innocent young people were abused by clerics and Religious to whose care they had been entrusted, while those who should have exercised vigilance often failed to do so effectively. Indeed, "wounds have been inflicted on Christ's body" (*Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland*, 19 March 2010). For these faults, forgiveness must once more be asked: from God and from the victims! As Blessed John Paul II said: "there is no place in the priesthood and religious life for those who would harm the young" (*Address to the Cardinals of the United States*, 23 April 2002).

At the same time the Visitors were able to verify that, beginning in the 1990s, progressive steps have been taken towards a greater awareness of how serious is the problem of abuse, both in the Church and society, and how necessary it is to find adequate measures in response.

The Visitation was also intended to determine whether the structures and procedures put in place by the Church in Ireland from that period onwards are adequate to ensure that the tragedy of the abuse of minors will not be repeated. In this regard, the Holy See has made the following observations:

- 1) Particular attention has been given to the assistance offered by the Church in Ireland to victims of past abuse. All the Visitators acknowledge that, beginning with the Bishops and Religious Superiors, much attention and care has been shown to the victims, both in terms of spiritual and psychological assistance and also from a legal and financial standpoint. It has been recommended, therefore, that, following the example given by Pope Benedict XVI in his meetings with victims of abuse, the Irish diocesan authorities and those of the Religious Institutes continue to devote much time listening to and receiving victims, providing support for them and their families.
- 2) Their meetings with the victims of abuse helped the Visitators to understand better various aspects of the problem of the sexual abuse of minors that took place in Ireland. The Visitators and the Church in Ireland are thankful for this contribution and want to assure them that their well-being is of paramount concern for the Church.
- 3) In their meetings with the chief officers of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church and various diocesan officials, the Visitators were able to verify that the current norms of *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland (Guidelines)* are being followed. The Visitators welcome the process, already initiated by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church, of regularly auditing the implementation of the *Guidelines*. It is recommended that this process of covering all Dioceses and Religious Institutes by regular audits will be implemented in a prompt manner.
- 4) In recent years the work of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church has been thorough and far-reaching, for which reason it should be supported by the Bishops, Religious Superiors and the whole community of the Church in Ireland, and it should continue to receive sufficient personnel and funding.
- 5) The Archbishops of the visited Archdioceses gave assurance that all newly-discovered cases of abuse are promptly brought before both the competent civil authority and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.
- 6) The norms contained in the *Guidelines*, as well as the procedures to implement them, must be updated in accordance with the indications published on 3 May 2011 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and also periodically revised. The *Guidelines* need to be amended in order to create a common model for all the Dioceses and Religious Institutes, and they should be periodically re-examined in order to ensure increasing effectiveness both in the work of prevention and in the response to cases of abuse in all the required aspects, for the good of everyone concerned.
- 7) In view of the shortage of personnel trained in canon law, the Visitators insisted on the need for a reorganization of Ireland's ecclesiastical tribunals, to be carried out in cooperation with the competent bodies of the Holy See, so that the various cases still awaiting definitive resolution can be adequately processed.
- 8) The Visitators were struck by the efforts made throughout the country by Bishops, priests, Religious and lay persons to implement the *Guidelines* and to create safe environments. In the four Archdioceses, the results of these efforts were judged to be excellent. In addition

to the large number of volunteers, they noted the presence of men and women within the various safeguarding structures who bring the highest level of professionalism to the service of the Christian community.

In the Visitation to the Seminaries, the following elements were examined: theological doctrine on the priesthood, seminary governance, questions regarding the admission of candidates to the seminary and assessment of them prior to ordination, the process of formation (human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral), and possible ways of assisting recently ordained priests. Particular attention was given to the admission of candidates and to programmes of spiritual and human formation aimed at enabling seminarians to live priestly celibacy faithfully and joyfully. The Visitation to the Seminaries gave priority to issues involving the protection of minors.

In this regard, the Holy See has made the following observations:

- 1) The Visitation was able to establish that there are dedicated formators in Irish seminaries, committed to the work of priestly training. The seminarians themselves were generally praised for their human and spiritual qualities and for their motivation and commitment to the Church and her mission. Studies are taken seriously, and attention is given to human and spiritual formation.
- 2) Each seminary has clear child protection norms in place and the Irish seminaries are committed to educating future priests with a broad understanding of all that is involved in the protection of minors within the Church.
- 3) For the further improvement of the seminaries, it has been proposed, wherever necessary:
 - a. to ensure that the formation provided is rooted in authentic priestly identity, offering a more systematic preparation for a life of priestly celibacy by maintaining a proper equilibrium between human, spiritual and ecclesial dimensions;
 - b. to reinforce structures of Episcopal governance over the seminaries;
 - c. to introduce more consistent admission criteria – this would involve the seminary, in consultation with the Dioceses, examining and deciding admissibility of candidates;
 - d. to show greater concern for the intellectual formation of seminarians, ensuring that it is in full conformity with the Church's Magisterium;
 - e. to include in the academic programme in-depth formation on matters of child protection, with increased pastoral attention to victims of sexual abuse and their families;
 - f. to re-evaluate the pastoral programme, ensuring that it is sacramental, priestly and apostolic, and duly concerned with preparing candidates to celebrate the sacraments and to preach;

- g. to ensure that the seminary buildings be exclusively for seminarians of the local Church and those preparing them for the priesthood, to ensure a well-founded priestly identity.

The task entrusted by the Holy See to the Visitators to Religious houses was twofold: 1) ensuring that all Religious Congregations have adequate protocols for safeguarding children and are implementing them; and 2) encouraging members of Institutes and Societies to a renewed vitality in their life and mission as Religious or members of Societies of Apostolic Life. In a spirit of cooperation with the Bishops, clergy and lay faithful of Ireland, the Superiors and members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life are encouraged to develop the resources at their disposal, so that they may be better equipped to meet the needs of those still suffering the effects of abuse. In the light of the immense contribution they have made in the past to the life of the Church in Ireland and their remarkable missionary outreach across the world, consecrated persons should renew their commitment to building communities capable of offering their members mutual support along the path towards holiness and capable of contributing effectively to the renewal of the entire local Church community.

In this regard, the Holy See has made the following observations:

- 1) The Religious in Ireland will join Bishops in mutual reflection, planning and support, revitalizing the instruments of dialogue and communion that have been envisioned by the Magisterium (cf. *Mutuae Relationes*). The Bishops themselves will convoke and lead the process of renewing dialogue and concrete collaboration in the field of safeguarding children, while also seeking to bring about a more effective and deeper communion between different and complementary charisms in the local Church.
- 2) The Major Superiors of each Institute in Ireland should design a programme for focusing anew over the next three years on the Institute's fundamental sources, particularly the following of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, and contained in the Apostolic Tradition of the Church's teaching, the living of their vows in a contemporary context, and the life, works and charism of the founder of the Institute (*Perfectae Caritatis, Vita Consecrata*).
- 3) All Institutes should perform an audit of their personnel files, if such an audit has not yet been carried out. As in the case of the Dioceses, every Religious Congregation, active and contemplative, should perform the regular audit monitoring the implementation of the norms contained in the *Guidelines*, in coordination with the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church.
- 4) Major Superiors should develop, with the members of their Institutes, concrete means for revitalizing communities of prayer, community life and mission.
- 5) The Religious in Ireland are asked to consider developing a collaborative ministerial outreach to those suffering from the effects of abuse.

Based on the proposal of the Visitators and the observations made by various Dicasteries of the Holy See, it has been recommended that the Bishops of Ireland and Religious Superiors, in collaboration with the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church, should continue to examine and update the current *Interim Guidance – Leave from Sacred Ministry and Apostolate for Clergy and Religious* with a view to:

- 1) Formulating guidelines for handling the varied cases of those who have been accused, but in whose case the Director of Public Prosecution has decided not to proceed.
- 2) Formulating policies regarding the falsely accused and their return to ministry.
- 3) Formulating policies regarding the pastoral care of those who are convicted of abuse: the appropriate settings and the conditions under which such offenders should live.

The Visitators have been able to establish that, over and above the suffering of the victims, the painful events of recent years have also opened many wounds within the Irish Catholic community. Many lay persons have experienced a loss of trust in their Pastors. Many good priests and Religious have felt unjustly tainted by association with the accused in the court of public opinion; some have not felt sufficiently defended by their Bishops and Superiors. Those same Bishops and Superiors have often felt isolated as they sought to confront the waves of indignation and at times they have found it difficult to agree on a common line of action.

On the other hand, this time of trial has also brought to light the continuing vitality of the Irish people's faith. The Visitators have noted the exemplary way in which many Bishops, priests and Religious live out their vocation, the human and spiritual bonds among the faithful at a time of crisis, the deep faith of many men and women, a remarkable level of lay involvement in the structures of child protection, and the heartfelt commitment shown by Bishops and Religious Superiors in their task of serving the Christian community.

These are just some of the signs of hope that the Visitators have identified, alongside the various difficulties, in the life of the Church in Ireland. It is vitally important that, at a point in history marked by rapid cultural and social transformation, all the components of the Church in Ireland hear in the first place a renewed call to communion: communion among the Bishops themselves and with the Successor of Peter; communion between diocesan Bishops and their clergy; communion between Pastors and lay persons; and communion between diocesan structures and communities of consecrated life - communion that is not attained merely through human agreements or strategies, but above all by listening humbly to God's Word and to what the Holy Spirit gives and asks of the Church in our day. Only a united Church can be an effective witness to Christ in the world.

Among the pastoral priorities that have emerged most strongly is the need for deeper formation in the content of the faith for young people and adults; a broad and well-planned ongoing theological and spiritual formation for clergy, Religious and lay faithful; a new focus on the role of the laity, who are called to be engaged both within the Church and in bearing witness before society, in accordance with the social teachings of the Church. There is a need to harness the contribution of the new Ecclesial Movements, in order better to reach the younger generation and to give renewed enthusiasm to Christian life. A careful review is needed of the training given to teachers of religion, the Catholic identity of schools and their relationship with the parishes to which they belong, so as to ensure a sound and well-balanced education.

Since the Visitators also encountered a certain tendency, not dominant but nevertheless fairly widespread among priests, Religious and laity, to hold theological opinions at variance with the teachings of the Magisterium, this serious situation requires particular attention, directed principally towards improved theological formation. It must be stressed that dissent from the fundamental teachings of the Church is not the authentic path towards renewal.

The Visitation also placed in question the present configuration of Dioceses in Ireland and their ability to respond adequately to the challenges of the New Evangelization. The Holy See and the local episcopate have already initiated a joint reflection on this matter, in which the communities concerned are to be involved, with a view to adapting diocesan structures to make them better suited to the present-day mission of the Church in Ireland.

Finally, the Visitation attested to the great need for the Irish Catholic community to make its voice heard in the media and to establish a proper relationship with those active in this field, for the sake of making known the truth of the Gospel and the Church's life.

For its part, the Holy See recalls the ongoing importance of the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, which proposes an overall vision that can shed useful light on the pastoral priorities of the Church in Ireland, and on the special attention that must be given to the younger generation. The forthcoming International Eucharistic Congress will surely represent an important stage in this process, as will the subsequent National Mission, which it is hoped will provide all the members of the Church community with a fruitful opportunity for prayer, common reflection and instruction on the content of the Christian creed, in harmony with the Holy Father's vision for the approaching Year of Faith. As Pope Benedict said in his *Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland*: "Through intense prayer before the real presence of the Lord, the Church in Ireland can make reparation for the sins of abuse that have done so much harm, at the same time imploring the grace of renewed strength and a deeper sense of mission on the part of all Bishops, priests, Religious and lay faithful."

In the name of the Holy Father, heartfelt gratitude must once again be expressed to all those who worked so generously to ensure a fruitful outcome for the Apostolic Visitation – firstly, to the Visitators and their assistants, then to the entire Catholic community of Ireland: the lay faithful, including the various victims of abuse, the Bishops, the clergy and the Religious communities who have responded so well to this concrete sign of the solicitude of the Successor of Peter for the future of the Church in Ireland.

Consequently, the Apostolic Visitation should now be considered completed. The Holy See entrusts its conclusions to the responsibility of the Bishops, clergy, Religious and lay faithful of Ireland, in the hope that they will bear fruit worthy of that process of healing, reparation and renewal which Pope Benedict XVI so eagerly desires for the beloved Church in Ireland.