

A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP BLAIR

As we celebrate Easter, I ask that this year we offer a special prayer for our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, and for the Church in reparation for the sin of sexual abuse.

I already pray every day for all the victims of such abuse. Soon after becoming your Bishop, I asked everyone to do the same. Today there is new outrage at the horrendous sins and crimes of some of the Church's priests and at the inexcusable failure to respond properly on the part of some of her bishops. However, nothing good is served by hurling accusations at Pope Benedict based on a deficient, even falsified, presentation of facts.

For example, what just or good thing is served by claiming that Cardinal Ratzinger refused to defrock a notorious abusive priest in Milwaukee, when the record shows that the priest, already removed from ministry, was ill and very close to death when consideration was given to forego a formal trial that would have taken months. It was Cardinal Ratzinger's office that had approved the trial and had also waived the statute of limitations. The presiding judge for the trial has pointed out that when the priest died "he was still the defendant in a church criminal trial," and further, "with regard to the role of the then-Cardinal Ratzinger in this matter, I have no reason to believe that he was involved at all."

Things are bad enough without trying to frame accusations against the one Bishop, now Pope, who has done more than anyone to address the sin and crime of clerical sexual abuse. After these cases were transferred to the competency of Cardinal Ratzinger's office by Pope John Paul, there was a tremendous improvement in dealing with them. Before becoming Pope he publicly lamented how much "filth" there was in Church, including the priesthood. As Pope he has apologized and met with victims, including victims in our country. I should add that the Catholic Church in the United States is fully committed by word and deed to maximum vigilance and mandated protections against the abuse of minors by anyone.

How the Holy Father chooses to respond to the current situation is not for me to say, but I have not been given any credible reason to doubt the integrity of our Holy Father when it comes to addressing sexual abuse or anything else. I can only commend him to our crucified and risen Lord, and to our prayers.