

**Pastoral Letter of Diarmuid Martin  
To the Priests and Catholic Faithful of the Archdiocese of Dublin.**

In these days after the Report of the Commission of investigation into the sexual abuse of children by priests in the Archdiocese of Dublin has been published, it is difficult to find words to describe how I feel. What can I say when I have to share with you the revolting story of the sexual assault and abuse of so many young children and teenagers by priests of the Archdiocese or who ministered in the diocese?

The Commission's Report gives us some insight into the crimes that took place. But no report can give an indication of the suffering and trauma endured by as yet unknown number of children and the suffering also for their family members. Many survivors have not yet been able to speak about abuse they experienced. For them the publication of the Report must be truly traumatic. I urge them to turn to some trusted friend or counselor and to the appropriate authorities.

The sexual abuse of a child is and always was a crime in civil law; it is and always was a crime in canon law; it is and always was grievously sinful. Efforts made to 'protect the Church' and to 'avoid scandal' have had the ironic result of bringing this horrendous scandal on the Church today.

One of the most heartbreaking aspects of this sad story is that while Church leaders – bishops and religious superiors – failed, almost every parent who came to the diocese to report abuse clearly understood the awfulness of what was involved. Almost exclusively their primary motivation was to try to ensure that what happened to their child, or in some cases to themselves, did not happen to other children. Their motivation was not about money or revenge; it was quite simply about that most basic human sense of right and wrong and that basic Christian motivation of concern for others.

The damage done to children abused by priests can never be undone. To each and every survivor, I express my own personal apology, my sorrow and my shame for what happened to them. I am aware however that no words of apology will ever be sufficient. The fact that the abusers were priests constituted both an offence to God and an affront to the priesthood. The many good priests of the Archdiocese share my sense of shame. I ask you to encourage them in their ministry at what is a difficult time. I know also that many parishioners, especially parents, feel shocked and betrayed at what has been revealed. I hope that all of us – bishops, priests and lay persons – working together can rebuild trust by ensuring that day after day the Church in the archdiocese of Dublin becomes a safer environment for children.

I thank all those who work in the diocese in improving our services of child protection. I ask the priests of the diocese and the Parish pastoral councils to ensure that the wide ranging measures introduced into our parishes and organizations regarding the safeguarding of children are rigorously observed and constantly verified and renewed. The current scandal must be an occasion for all of us to be vigilant so that the abuse of children – wherever it takes place in our society – is addressed and the correct measures are taken promptly.

The theft of childhood which survivors endured was not recognized, and the diocese failed in its responses to them when they had the courage to come forward, compounding the damage done to their innocence. No words of apology will ever be sufficient. I pray that those who suffered will come one day to experience the gift of healing which we as individuals cannot bring, but only the loving kindness of the Lord Jesus.

Diarmuid Martin  
Archbishop of Dublin