

Pope begs forgiveness for clergy sex abuse: Victims say words not enough

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Pope Benedict XVI begged forgiveness for sexual abuse by Roman Catholic priests at a Vatican gathering on June 11 of nearly 15,000 clergy, concluding the celebration of the “Year for Priests.” The pontiff pledged on that final day to do “everything possible” to stop “sin within the church,” but victims’ groups say they want action, not apologies or promises.

The event’s irony was conceded by Benedict. “And so it happened that, 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,” he said at the mass before one of the largest gatherings of clergy ever in St. Peter’s Square. “We too beg forgiveness from God and from the persons involved, while promising to do everything possible to ensure that such abuse will never occur again.”

Five bishops in Europe have already resigned as a consequence of the scandal that has seen prominent cases in Ireland, Germany, Belgium, Austria and the United States in recent months and threatened to engulf the pope himself. Benedict had already issued a pastoral letter to Irish Catholics in March expressing shame and remorse, and on a recent trip to Portugal he said the greatest threat came from “the sin inside the church.”

A group for victims said the pope’s words were not enough. “Forgiveness comes after, not during, a crisis,” said Barbara Blaine, president of SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. She called for an independent inquiry into priests’ abuse and a reduction in the power of bishops.

“The root cause of this horrific and ongoing clergy sex abuse and cover-up crisis remains the nearly limitless power of bishops,” she said.

Benedict also promised on June 10 that the church would tighten controls on choosing men for priesthood: “We will do everything we can to weigh the authenticity of their vocation and make every effort to accompany priests along their journey.” But he dismissed the possibility of a change to the celibacy rule. After reformers—including women’s groups—had marched on Rome on June 8 calling for

evolution in the church's male-dominated structure, the pontiff said celibacy is "an act of faith and fidelity" toward God. *-Religion News Service*