

Cardinal says bishops must 'cooperate' with police on abuse

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February 7, 2012

c. 2012 Religion News Service VATICAN CITY (RNS) The Vatican's doctrinal chief on Monday (Feb. 6) told Catholic bishops from all over the world that they have a duty to "cooperate" with civil law on cases of clergy sexual abuse of minors.

Cardinal William J. Levada, a former archbishop of San Francisco who now heads the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with jurisdiction over abuse cases, stopped short, however, of requiring bishops to report abuse cases to prosecutors or police.

Speaking to a Vatican-sponsored conference on the church's response to the scandal at Rome's Gregorian University, Levada admitted that the church's relations with civil authorities "may be different from one nation to another," but stressed that this must not affect the basic principle of cooperation.

He also urged bishops to be "more proactive" in their response to the crisis, rather than wait for the scandal to erupt in the media.

Last May, the Vatican gave all bishops conferences around the world one year to draft voluntary "guidelines" on preventing abuse, caring for victims, disciplining abusive priests, and reporting suspected abuse to local police.

An estimated 4,000 cases of sexual abuse by clergy have been reported to Levada's Vatican department during the last 10 years, he said.

Levada also highlighted the importance of listening to victims' grievances, accompanying them "on the often long path of healing," and encouraging them to follow the example of Pope Benedict XVI in meeting with victims.

In a message sent to the conference participants, Benedict wrote that victims healing must be of "paramount concern" for the church. The Chicago-based Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests dismissed the conference as "window

dressing" that will not result in real reform.