

Priest quits TV show after comments on sex abuse

News in the [October 3, 2012](#) issue

Benedict Groeschel, a well-known Catholic author and television personality, has given up his longtime spot on the conservative cable network EWTN following comments in which he appeared to defend clergy who abuse children and also to blame some of the victims.

“Father Benedict has led a life of tremendous compassion and service to others, and his spiritual insights have been a great gift to the EWTN family for many years. We are profoundly grateful to him and assure him of our prayers,” Michael P. Warsaw, head of EWTN Global Catholic Network, said in announcing the priest’s decision to step down.

In his statement September 3, Warsaw also asked EWTN viewers “to pray for all those who have been affected by this painful situation and in particular those who have been victims of sexual abuse.”

Groeschel’s departure as host of EWTN’s *Sunday Night Prime* program is a loss for conservative Catholics who looked to the Franciscan friar—a distinctive figure with his gray habit and white beard—as a champion of their values and agenda in the culture wars.

But the move was no surprise. Groeschel the week before sparked a firestorm when he gave an interview saying priests who sexually abuse children “on their first offense” should not go to jail and that in “a lot of cases” the child is “the seducer.”

He also expressed sympathy for Jerry Sandusky, the former Penn State assistant football coach convicted in June of 45 counts of child sexual abuse.

The comments drew criticism from all sides. A spokesman for New York’s Cardinal Timothy Dolan, a longtime friend of Groeschel’s, denounced the remarks. The newspaper that ran the interview, the *National Catholic Register*, which is an EWTN affiliate, removed the interview from its website and replaced it with an apology.

Groeschel himself also apologized, as did his New York-based community, the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. Both Groeschel and the friars blamed his age—he is 78—and recent health problems for Groeschel’s comments and said the controversy had effectively ended his public career. —RNS

This article was edited on September 17, 2012.