NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

The Catholic community's right to know

Tom Roberts | Jul. 30, 2009 NCR Today

An interesting opinion piece [1] by Mary Raftery appeared in the July 27 issue of The Irish Times regarding publication of Dublin Report, the result of a government inquiry into clergy sex abuse in the Archdiocese.

Her piece is one more cry from the Catholic community regarding it's right to know what happened in the clergy sex abuse crisis. It is the cry of adults in a community who are asked to receive, without questioning, our leadership, its teachings, the next pastor. In this matter, however, Catholics are not unquestioning or satisfied with general requests from the hierarchy for forgiveness.

This is a matter of public scandal that affected the community at its very roots, and the need to know precedes any ultimate healing, forgiveness or reconciliation. That need is very much in line with adult membership in a community and our sacramental sensibilities. We're taught that forgiveness and reconciliation doesn't happen in some celestial vacuum; it happens among real people who need information in order to make it happen.

In the United States, we don't have the equivalent government commissions, but we do have, as in the case of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and, more recently, the Diocese of Bridgeport, courts that can require the church to turn over the documentation that describes how our leaders acted in this crisis. Few, if any, have been willing to describe that history frankly and in detail with their dioceses.

But the need to know and the church's parallel insistence on secrecy are like pieces of flint striking, fueling the longevity of the scandal.

Source URL (retrieved on *10/04/2015 - 11:29*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/catholic-communitys-right-know

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[1] http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2009/0727/1224251384687.html