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Cardinal sides with victims, condemns sex crimes

Carol Glatz Catholic News Service | Apr. 17, 2010

VATICAN CITY -- The Catholic Church is determined not to hide or minimize the "horrible" crime of the sexual abuse of minors by priests, said the head of the Vatican Congregation for Clergy.

Cardinal Claudio Hummes said members of church "are on the side of the victims and want to support their recovery and their offended rights."

The cardinal's comments came in a letter preparing for the conclusion of the Year for Priests, which ends June 11. The letter was published April 12 on the congregation's Year for Priests Web site.

Even though a proportionately small number of Catholic priests are guilty of abuse, these "horrible and most serious crimes" must be condemned and admonished "in an absolute and uncompromising manner," wrote Cardinal Hummes.

"Those individuals must answer for their actions before God and before tribunals, including the civil courts," he wrote.

Yet people also should pray that those guilty of abuse "achieve spiritual conversion and receive pardon from God," the letter said.

"The church, for her part, is determined neither to hide nor to minimize such crimes," it said.

However, Cardinal Hummes criticized attempts to "use the crimes of the few in order to sully the entire ecclesial body of priests," adding that those who did so were committing "a profound injustice."

The Year for Priests, which Pope Benedict XVI established last year, has been a valuable occasion to give special attention and recognition to "the great, hardworking and irreplaceable presbyterium, and to each individual priest of the church," he wrote.

Speaking to priests around the world, the cardinal said, "The church loves you, admires you and respects you," and he reminded them that they have the support of the Catholic faithful, "especially in these times of suffering."

Cardinal Hummes called on the world's priests to converge on St. Peter's Square for the concluding ceremonies of the Year for Priests so as to "show themselves ready and un-intimidated" to serve humanity.

A large and visible presence of priests in the square "will be a proclamation before the modern world of their being sent not to condemn the world, but to save it."

Priests should also attend the concluding ceremonies June 9-11 to show Pope Benedict their solidarity and support, he wrote.

The cardinal said that the pope has been unjustly attacked for his handling of clerics involved in the sexual abuse of minors because no one has done as much as Pope Benedict "to condemn and combat properly such crimes."

"The large presence of priests in the square with him will be a determined rejection of the unjust attacks of which he is a victim," the cardinal wrote.

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