

## Ten reasons the Vatican's new abuse guidelines will change little

David Clohessy | May. 16, 2011 | Examining the Crisis

In a circular letter to the world's bishops released today, the Vatican's Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith has asked every bishops' conference in the world to prepare "guidelines" for dealing with cases of sexual abuse of minors by clergy. (See [Vatican guidelines seek consistency on sex abuse](#) [1].)

I believe that the guidelines will change very little in how the Catholic church handles these cases. Here are 10 reasons why I think that:

### 1) They're just "guidelines."

They aren't binding or mandatory, just suggestions -- unlike the new rules or "instructions" the Vatican just issued about the Latin Mass. (See [Vatican norms insist on 'generous' approval for use of Tridentine rite](#) [2].)

### 2) Such voluntary "guidelines" have been widely ignored in the past.

A notable example: Throughout the 1990s, U.S. bishops almost entirely ignored their own similar voluntary guidelines on abuse that they adopted in 1993.

### 3) The "guidelines" won't require bishops to call the police when they know of or suspect child sex crimes.

Calling the police is, perhaps, the single most effective step a bishop can take to protect kids.

### 4) In the handful of nations with allegedly mandatory church abuse policies, those policies are unenforced.

For instance, the 2002 U.S. policy, which is supposedly "church law," is increasingly being violated (especially the provisions around "transparency") with no consequences whatsoever to the wrongdoers. (See: [Philadelphia's fall raises questions elsewhere](#) [3].)

The most egregious recent example is of course the Philadelphia archdiocese, which, according to prosecutors and grand jurors, kept dozens of credibly accused predator priests in ministry for years until just two months ago. (See: [What went wrong in Philly? Review board chair responds](#) [4].)

### 5) Even if Benedict wanted to enforce the guidelines, the church STRUCTURE is a huge obstacle.

The pope allegedly oversees 4,400 bishops across the planet, an inherently unworkable structure.

### 6) Even if Benedict wanted to enforce the guidelines, the church CULTURE is a huge obstacle.

Centuries of self-serving secrecy can't be easily reversed. Look at how powerful prelates like Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Vatican secretary of state from 1990 to 2006, protected Fr. Marcial Maciel Degollado for so long. (See: [How Fr. Maciel built his empire](#) [5])

### 7) Few, if any, church officials are apparently pushing for real reform.

If there were a vocal contingent, however small, of bishops who were strongly advocating truly effective prevention measures, some Vatican officials might feel some pressure to compromise with them. But evidently,

there is no cadre of truly brave, outspoken bishops.

**8) Wrongdoers keep being promoted and whistleblowers keep being ostracized, so why would more vague words on paper bring any change in how bishops deal with abuse and cover up?**

Bishops like Diarmuid Martin in Ireland, Geoffrey Robinson in Australia and Thomas Gumbleton in the United States are isolated by their peers while prelates like Bernard Law formerly of Boston and Justin Rigali of Philadelphia are tolerated and even promoted. (Just last month, Benedict tapped Rigali, America's most widely-discredited prelate, to be the pope's special representative at a big church celebration in [the Czech Republic next month](#) [6].)

In the United States, a number of highly controversial and compromised church officials have been recently elevated by Pope Benedict: Christopher J. Coyne of Boston in March was ordained the first Indianapolis, Ind., auxiliary bishop since 1933; Joseph R. Cistone, an auxiliary in Philadelphia was moved to head the Saginaw, Mich. diocese; Jose H. Gomez was an auxiliary bishop in Denver, spent five years as archbishop of San Antonio, Texas, and then was appointed to Los Angeles.

**9) They're a very belated move.**

Top church staff have known of clergy sex crimes and cover ups for decades, if not centuries.

**10) They're a very begrudging move.**

The guidelines are being written now only because the crisis has reached the pope's doorstep. Pressure has come from investigative reporting on Benedict's role concealing cases and due to increasing numbers and success of civil lawsuits).

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