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REPENTANCE AND SORROW

Recently, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, sent a letter to the Church in Ireland, regarding the tragic incidents involving the sexual abuse of minors. In his letter, he made reference to the horror surrounding these crimes. He referred to them as “criminal and sinful acts”. Much to the shame of the Church, these crimes are more horrifying when they are perpetrated by members of the clergy. As a Church, we sympathize with the victims and feel the need for repentance for the sins of those who committed these abuses. Yet we also suffer the humiliation of knowing that these crimes were committed by those who, in the name of the Church, were duty-bound to nurture and protect these young people. This is a moment of humiliation for the entire Church.

This applies also in the case of the Church in Malta, who, in the same vein as the Pope, expresses its grave sorrow and repentance towards all those who have been abused, towards all our Christian brothers who have been hurt, and towards Maltese society in general.

In his letter, the Pope reiterates that which he has always stated in the past, that is, these cases should be treated without any measure of weakness. Meanwhile, the Church continues to pray for the conversion of those who committed these acts.

The Church in Malta was one of the first dioceses to take action. In 1999, it took the necessary measures to set up a council known as Response Team, under the chairmanship of a retired Judge, in order to investigate allegations of sexual abuse both on minors, as well as on adults, by members of the clergy, religious and pastoral operators. In order that these cases could be investigated as quickly as possible, another Response Team was formed just a few months later. In the light of the letter which Pope Benedict XVI addressed to the Church in Ireland, the Church in Malta continues to intensify its commitment towards battling these abuses.

In cases of such severity, we hereby appeal to all Christians to cooperate with the competent authorities, including the civil authorities. We reiterate that which the Church already stated in 1999: Christians are obliged to cooperate with the Church, rather than

disguising facts or remaining silent, in order that this wound may be healed once and for all.

In spite of the fact that these cases are a source of humiliation for the Church, it must continue to fulfill the mission entrusted to her by God, in favour of mankind's well being, in the light of the Good News of the Kingdom.

We must assume for ourselves the words which St Paul spoke when referring to his own weakness: "for my power (the Lord's) is made perfect in weakness....for when I am weak (St Paul), I am strong" (2 Cor 12, 9-10). Let us embrace this moment of humiliation and suffering as a call to further unite our mission as a Church together with our human capabilities, recognizing always that these are dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

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