

Resolution of the Austrian Pastors' Initiative (*Pfarrer-Initiative*)
May 2, 2010

For several weeks, serious charges have been raised against Pope Benedict XVI concerning his handling of cases of sexual exploitation as prefect of the doctrinal congregation. The continuing lack of an open review by the Pope himself damages the credibility of all efforts in the church for decisive and transparent treatment of past cases and for the most effective prevention possible of further cases.

We appeal to the Pope: Commission an entity independent of the hierarchy with the complete clarification of the questions raised by these accusations, or else resign from your office.

We in the Pastors' Initiative (*Pfarrer-Initiative*) are deeply concerned at the extent of cases of sexual exploitation uncovered in the Church. Unfortunately, it was only the pressure of media reporting which led to decisive action by Church leadership. A comprehensive accounting for what has happened surely cannot succeed if current structures in the Church are bracketed out. It is evident that authoritarian structures, in the larger society as in the Church, both encourage and conceal sexual exploitation and the excessive use of force on subordinates, dependents, and naive individuals. The handling of cases of abuse of spiritual and religious authority through sexual exploitation reveals profound defects in the Church's structures of responsibility:

- unchecked sole responsibility and power of the Pope without sufficient integration into a collegial structure of leadership;
- with this, shutting out bishops at an intermediate level of leadership;
- lack of a legal system with division of powers as is expected in our day;
- minimal transparency in decisions, including when a decision is not made;
- lack of a culture of accountability of office holders and authorities to the church faithful;
- exclusion of the church faithful from decision-making and other matters.

The present absolutist structure of the Church impedes finding a solution to pressing questions for the Church's future:

- reshaping the life of Christian communities;
- reform of Church teaching according to the standards of the Gospel;
- ecumenism of the Christian Churches;
- dialogue with the religions of the world;
- worldwide solidarity in view of the dignity and rights of every person.

We appeal to the bishops in their responsibility for the cares and concerns of local churches and communities and in their collegial responsibility for the leadership of the universal Church: speak up together for the calling of a Council to treat large questions of the way forward for our Church.

In recent weeks, extraordinarily many people have again turned away from and left our Church. In most cases, we pastors and our female and male pastoral associates had no chance for a clarifying conversation in connection with this decision. Most often our parishes are too large and our contact to people is too slight, so that we cannot show them what is really at stake for the Church as a local community, and why it would be rewarding to belong to the Church as an active member.

We appeal to Christian women and men in our Church: do not leave the Church, but rather support reform movements so that the Church can fulfill its mandate in a way fitting our day. The Church exists for the people, and not the other way around!

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