

Pope Francis begs forgiveness from sex abuse victims

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USPA News - Pope Francis privately met with several European victims of clergy sexual abuse at the Vatican on Monday, saying there is no place for abusers in the church and begging forgiveness from those who have suffered. It was the pope's first such meeting.

The meeting, with three men and three women from the UK, Ireland and Germany, took place at Santa Marthae residence in Vatican City. The pontiff first had breakfast with them before spending nearly 3.5 hours in a series of private conversations, according to Vatican Radio. Each victim spent approximately half an hour with the pontiff and they later attended Monday mass. In a homily delivered by Pope Francis during the Mass, the pontiff begged the congregation for forgiveness. He apologized on behalf of the church for the "grave crimes" committed by the clergymen and for the "sins of omission" that had taken place when church leaders failed to respond to reports of abuse. He recognized that such negligence had led to even greater suffering by the abused and endangered other minors who were at risk. "Before God and his people I express my sorrow for the sins and grave crimes of clerical sexual abuse committed against you. And I humbly ask forgiveness," he said. Each victim was accompanied by a friend or relative and members of the newly-created Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. Pope Francis, describing the abusive clergy's actions as "something more than despicable," also expressed deep sorrow over the suffering of the victims. "It is like a sacrilegious cult, because these boys and girls had been entrusted to the priestly charism in order to be brought to God," he said. The pontiff added: "They profane the very image of God in whose likeness we were created. Today the heart of the Church looks into the eyes of Jesus in these boys and girls and wants to weep; she asks the grace to weep before the execrable acts of abuse which have left lifelong scars." Pope Francis lamented the emotional and spiritual pain inflicted by the abusers on the victims and noted that the abuse had caused some to resort to harmful addictions. He also brought attention to the difficulties many victims had experienced in important relationships in their lives, including those with spouses, parents, and children, and how some had resorted to suicide. He expressed his condolences to the families of those who had committed suicide. "Sins of clerical sexual abuse against minors have a toxic effect on faith and hope in God. Some of you have held fast to faith, while for others the experience of betrayal and abandonment has led to a weakening of faith in God. Your presence here speaks of the miracle of hope, which prevails against the deepest darkness," he said, referring to the presence of the six victims. After praising the courage the abused had shown, the pontiff pledged "not to tolerate harm done to a minor by any individual, whether a cleric or not," saying that there is no place in the Catholic Church for those who commit such abuse and promising that clergy be held accountable.

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