
Pope Francis: letter to French Bishops gathered in Lourdes, “I am with you in the storm of shame and the drama of abuse”

“As you go through the storm caused by the shame and the drama of child abuse by the Church, I encourage you to carry your burden with faith and hope, and I carry it with you”. Pope Francis wrote this to the Bishops of France, gathered for their Plenary Assembly in Lourdes to discuss and exchange views on the recently published CIASE Report on abuse committed by the Catholic Church in France over the last 70 years. In a letter sent to Mgr. Éric de Moulins-Beaufort, Archbishop of Reims and President of the French Bishops’ Conference, the Pope indicates the direction to take: “I am sure that together, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – he wrote -, you will find ways to honour the victims and console them; to exhort all believers to penance and conversion of hearts; to take all necessary measures to make the Church a safe place for all; to take care of the wounded and scandalised Holy People of God; and, finally, to resume your mission with joy, with eyes turned toward the future”. “In the trials and contradictions that you are facing - the Holy Father went on to write -, be assured of the support and communion of the Apostolic See. Do not doubt that the people of France await the Good News of Christ, they need it more than ever. For this reason, I entrust with particular tenderness to your paternal solicitude the immense majority of your priests who fulfil their ministry with generosity and dedication, and whose beautiful vocation is, unfortunately, being sullied. They need to be strengthened and supported in this difficult time”. “I am pleased to see that you will have the opportunity, during your Assembly, to address other important topics that are dear to my heart, such as the care for our common home, with an in-depth analysis of the encyclical *Laudato si’*, and ecumenism. I pray for you and your work”. After two and a half years of work, the Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church of France has made public the findings of its investigation. The report, which was also presented at the National Assembly, estimates that, between 1950 and 2020, 216,000 minors suffered sexual abuse at the hands of clergy. By broadening the analysis to include persons connected to the Church (staff of Catholic schools, laypersons providing catechism or chaplaincy services, organizers of scouts or other Catholic youth movements), the estimated number of child victims rises to 330,000.

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