

April 17, 2010

Dear Pope Benedict,

I am sure the past couple months have not been a lot of fun for you. I understand you were planning to retire before you were elected pope, so maybe you wish someone else were dealing with the current situation. But it is you in charge now, whether you wanted the job or not.

I am writing to tell you that you have an opportunity to be one of the greatest popes in history. You can be a leader, not just a figurehead, and here is how:

- Implement a set of policies worldwide to prevent physical and sexual abuse of children by anyone who works for the Roman Catholic Church.
- Cooperate with civil authorities to prosecute anyone associated with the church who is credibly suspected of abuse, regardless of when the abuse occurred.
- End the practice of moving abusive priests around the world to avoid embarrassment and prosecution.
- Fire any bishop, at any level, who has enabled abuse. The definition of “enabled” should be broad, to include bishops who knew about abuse, should have known, or looked the other way so he would not know. While a small percentage of priests were abusers, it is likely that a significant portion of bishops were enablers. This is because a bishop only needs one abusive priest under his authority to be morally culpable in the abuse. Consider yourself lucky if you only have to fire half of the 5000 bishops worldwide.
- Since you were one of the enabler bishops, resign the papacy after finishing these tasks. As an act of good faith, you can announce your future resignation at the start of this process.

Now, I'm sure you are aghast at these suggestions. You probably are thinking, "I cannot do that. I would destroy my church." In fact, your church is destroying itself, and you have the opportunity to save it.

By taking these steps, you will be revered for a thousand years as the pope who had the courage to end a dark thread in the history of the Roman church. Deep in your heart, you know that abuse of minors has probably been going on within the Catholic Church for a very long time, maybe the last thousand years. You can stop it.

You did not seek to be put in this position. But great leaders often did not ask for the job; they were thrown into it and then responded with vision and bravery. You have a chance to be one of those leaders.

Sincerely,
Chuck Connell
Bedford, MA, USA

(Full disclosure: I have made this letter available on the Internet and submitted it to a newspaper.)