

FABC – OFFICE OF CLERGY
INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR FOR BISHOPS AND FORMATORS ON
“THE IMPACT OF PEDOPHILIA CRISIS ON THE CHURCH IN ASIA”

FINAL STATEMENT

We, the participants of the above seminar, consisting of 1 Cardinal, 2 Archbishops, 7 Bishops, 54 seminary formators and 2 Lay Professionals from 7 countries of Asia, gathered at the Assumption University Campus, Bangkok, Thailand from 14th – 19th November 2011. We are grateful to Bishop Vianney Fernando, Chairman of FABC-Office of the Clergy and its Executive Secretary, Fr. Lawrence Pinto MSIJ for having organized this seminar so well. We found the subject very relevant and challenging especially in today’s context where this issue has been given much attention in the universal Church.

Objectives

The objectives of the seminar were the following:

1. To make the Bishops, priests and seminary formators actively aware of the gravity of sexual abuse of minors and other vulnerable persons of the Church in Asia.
2. To explore the possibilities of remedial measures for sexual abuse of minors and propose programs to train skilled personnel to handle and prevent future cases of sexual abuse of minors.
3. To help prepare guidelines for Church leaders, seminary formators and those in charge of Children’s organizations for the protection especially of the children.

Main topics presented and discussed

In the course of the seminar, the in-put talks by the resource persons helped us to deliberate on six -major topics:

1. Basic definitions, Symptoms, Causes and Diagnosis relating to Sexual abuse of minors

Sexual abuse of minors refers to any sexual interest in children or the act of child sexual abuse. It is a psycho-sexual disorder and needs therapy. Recent research offers an ample number of distinctive characteristics which facilitate its diagnosis. We were also alerted to several myths about pedophilia among priests, namely: Catholic priests are more likely to be pedophiles than other groups of men, the celibate state of Priests leads to Pedophilia, married clergy would make Pedophilia and other forms of sexual misconduct disappear, clerical celibacy was a medieval invention, female Clergy would help solve the problem, homosexuality is not connected to

pedophilia, the Catholic Hierarchy has done nothing to address pedophilia, the Church's teachings of sexual morality is the real problem, not pedophilia, Catholic journalists have ignored the pedophile problem and that requiring celibacy limits the number of men as candidates for the Priesthood, resulting in a high number of sexually unbalanced priests. In any case, priestly life being a vocation, the church has a duty to discern whether a candidate is indeed worthy and fit physically, psychologically and spiritually for a celibate way of life in the priestly service.

2. Its impact on the Universal Church

The paper presented an overview of the way the Christian community has considered sexual abuse of minors by clerics as a grave violation of divine positive and ecclesial law; some considerations as to why sexual abuse of minors by clerics is a tragic wound to the Church; the teaching of Blessed John Paul II on the truth as the basis of justice; and a detailed account of the steps Bishops should follow in investigating sexual abuse cases and referring them to the Holy See under Canon Law. A strategy of prevention of sexual abuse of minors was finally presented in ten points.

3. The role of the church leaders in handling the challenge of sexual abuse of minors

The response of the church leaders was looked at taking into account the Church's official teaching and the history of the problem as such. However, while the problem had not been directly dealt with, a mark of secrecy seems to have clouded this response. The sexual abuse of minors has brought in also the issue of the credibility of the Church and her leaders. It is of paramount importance that we pay the utmost attention to formulating standards of prevention that would involve the recruitment and formation of candidates, and establishing a code of conduct that guides our pastoral care of minors at all levels.

4. Legal implications of allegations of sexual abuse of minors and the rights of the alleged victimizer

In discussing the above topic, the participants had the opportunity of familiarizing themselves with an overview of the various legal offences, principles and procedures bearing on sexual abuse as followed in some countries of Asia. In this background and the discussion that ensued, the participants were able to see areas where civil and canon laws converge and differ on cases involving sexual abuse. The point was also made that Church authorities should follow the Civil Law applicable in their respective countries or jurisdictions.

5. The Church's obligation to protect children from sexual abusers and the need to assist the victims

This reflection led us to delve into very practical measures that could be adopted both on short and long-term basis to assist the victims by way of rehabilitation, repairing the damage and offering pastoral care to the abused. Among the points highlighted were: matters pertaining to the choice of candidates of priesthood and religious life and programs of seminary formation,

how the Presbyterium and the community can assist in the situation. The capacity-building of the children and the family was seen as an important element in prevention and healing. A critical evaluation has to be made of the procedures that are now in vogue in dealing with cases of sexual abuse of minors by priests.

6. Therapeutic measures for the alleged Pedophiles and the need of awareness-programs for Church ministers in the dioceses

This presentation dealt in detail about the therapeutic measures and Treatment plan for the priests involved in the sexual abuse of minors. It was observed that as far as present research goes that sexual abuse of minors is treatable though not basically curable. Hence, therapeutic measures are to be seen as an attempt for treatment rather than for a cure. The objectives of the treatment lay emphasis on priority attention to be given to the sex-abuser and his need to respond conscientiously in the best positive way possible. Preventive measures can be both proactive and reparative as the case may be. It is important to note that while the Church comes to the defense of the human dignity of every person, that on the one hand sexual abuse is an open assault on the human person and on the other hand, that the pastoral significance of the priesthood loses its impact if it harms the community at large. In order to provide effective treatment to victims and victimizers there is the need for trained and skilled personnel in this field.

Discussions and Recommendations

Group discussions were conducted for interactive participation of those attending the seminar. They were based on clarifying concepts. The observations of the discussion are as follows:

While pedophilia is easily distinguishable from ephebophilia, the pain and injury in each situation accordingly varies and each would require therapy and pastoral care in keeping with their specific nature. The problems involved must be confronted with veracity and transparency while avoiding the surrounding secrecy. All agreed on the basic need of qualified personnel and a code of conduct for priests and those working with children. Creating safe environmental measures is essential while being sensitive to the socio-cultural context of Asia.

When situations of sexual abuse of minors by priests arise, the Church authority has to act promptly with due pastoral care and charity towards both the victimizer and the victim with due regard to what is mandatory in both civil and canon law. When needed, recourse has to be had to the Holy See.

In many of our countries procedures need to be put in place to deal with sexual abuse of minors. There is a serious lack of professionals who can deal with this problem. A centre for treatment is an urgent need as well. On the other hand, we must evolve a typical Asian response to the problem bearing in mind our socio-cultural and religious context. It was also proposed that our families need more concerted pastoral and spiritual care. A code of conduct is to be formulated and that we ensure that our seminary formators and spiritual directors have the adequate skills needed in discerning and forming our candidates.