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PRESS RELEASE  
GERMAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE



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**Statement  
of Cardinal Reinhard Marx,  
President of the German Bishops' Conference,**

**Press conference on the presentation  
of the Study "Sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests, deacons and  
male members of orders in the domain of the  
German Bishops' Conference" (MHG Study)  
on 25 September 2018 in Fulda**

The study on "Sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests, deacons and male members of orders in the domain of the German Bishops' Conference" makes it clear to us that the Catholic Church has by no means overcome the issue of dealing with the sexual abuse of minors. The study takes a deep look into the past.

I say quite clearly: sexual abuse is a crime. Those who are guilty must be punished. For too long abuse has been denied and hushed up in the church. One simply looked away. I apologize for all failure and for all pain and suffering. I am ashamed because of the trust that has been destroyed; because of the crimes that have been committed by officials of the Church; and I feel shame, because many people have looked the other way and did not want to see what had happened and who did not care about the victims. This also applies to me. We have not listened to the victims. All this must not remain without consequences! Those affected are entitled to justice.

Since 2010, we have committed ourselves in the German Bishops' Conference and taken appropriate measures to make an unconditional orientation towards the victims our first priority and to prevent that more people become victims. But I ask myself: is this what we are doing enough? Justice must be done to the victims of sexual violence. We feel that it is urgently necessary to approach and listen to those affected in order to understand what is happening. We do not want to fight sexual abuse in the church without listening to those affected. We must create a climate in which others also have the courage to deal with their suffering and injuries.

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We have looked away too long for the sake of the institution and because we wanted to protect the bishops and priests. We have allowed power structures and for the most part have promoted clericalism, which in turn has encouraged violence and abuse. We have been able to fulfil some of our 2010 commitments, but we are not at the end of our journey, and the results of this study clearly show that we need to go further. Dealing with sexual violence in the sphere of the church continues to demand our committed and convincing action.

Once again: As a Church we are responsible and must assume responsibility. As a Church we want to build up new trust and do not want to disappoint. I know that this is difficult. I understand the people who say, "We don't believe you". I very much hope that we will be able to regain confidence. And, to be clear, this is not about saving an institution.

This morning we have received a comprehensive presentation by the research consortium. The examination of the results and the consequences is not finished, but is beginning now. A look back into the past was necessary in order to dare embark on a new chapter.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the research consortium that has met this challenging task and to all those who have supported the project in the dioceses. I am grateful to the external experts who helped the consortium, but also us, to take a critical view. They have been and are people whom we can ask for advice in order to bring about change. And, of course, I am grateful to all those who were willing to talk: Those affected, perpetrators and innocent priests.

With its statements, the study also intervenes in a universal church debate. I have already briefly informed the Holy Father about the results. On the recommendation of the C9 Council, he invited the presidents of all national Bishops' Conferences to the Vatican for February next year. I very much welcome this step. The World Bishops' Synod meeting in Rome in October can already contribute to the deepening of the debate. Just like the other German Synod Fathers I will also raise the topic of sexual abuse and the findings of the study there. The topic must not be ignored at the Synod.

The study makes us aware that we must continue and strengthen the course of truthfulness and our commitment to the protection of children in the manner specified by Pope Francis. For the sake of those affected. For the sake of the Church. And for the sake of a new basis of trust and credibility.