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Pope: Others should be held to same abuse 'standards'

by Francis X. Rocca by Religion News Service

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI told bishops from New York state that "all other institutions" in society should be held to the same "exacting standards" as the Roman Catholic Church in preventing and reporting sex abuse.

Benedict spoke on Saturday, one day before New York's Syracuse University announced that it had fired its associate men's basketball coach, Bernie Fine, over charges that he had sexually abused young boys.

Speaking to a delegation led by New York Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan, the pope praised the bishops' "honest efforts" at protecting children against sex abuse, and dealing "appropriately and transparently with allegations as they arise."

"It is my hope that the church's conscientious efforts to confront this reality will help the broader community" to understand and respond to sex abuse, Benedict said.

The pope also encouraged the bishops in their efforts to confront the "grave challenges ... presented by an increasingly secular society," including "attempts to still the church's voice in the public square."

U.S. Catholic bishops, concerned about Obama administration policies on birth control and gay rights that they say see as an unprecedented "assault" on the rights of religious groups, recently established a watchdog panel to combat threats to "religious liberty."

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