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Canadian bishop tells synod that church must respond to abuse crisis

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

Synod of Bishops 2012

Vatican City — A Canadian bishop whose diocese was rocked by clerical sex abuse crises told the Synod of Bishops that the new evangelization must address the reality of distrust and disappointment the scandal left in its wake.

With the sex abuse crisis, Catholics have experienced "a great disorientation that leads to forms of distrust of teachings and values that are essential for the followers of Christ," Bishop Brian J. Dunn of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, told the synod Friday.

The Diocese of Antigonish has sold hundreds of properties in an effort to raise the money necessary to cover legal settlement and sexual abuse lawsuit costs from before Dunn's appointment. In 2011, the previous bishop, Raymond Lahey, pled guilty and was jailed on charges of importing child pornography. The former bishop was laicized by the Vatican in May.

The Catholic church cannot ignore the need to find a way to "evangelize those who have been deeply hurt by clergy who have been involved in sexual abuse," Dunn told the synod.

One possible way forward, Dunn said, is to look at the story of the disciples, disillusioned by Jesus' death, who are met by the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus. Christ walks with them and listens to them, the bishop said.

Dioceses must have real structures in place for listening to victims and coming to appreciate "the depth of hurt, anger and disillusionment associated with this scandal," he told the synod.

At the same time, the church needs to investigate the causes of the sexual abuse crisis and ensure measures are in place to protect children and vulnerable adults.

"Those who have been hurt consistently call for a change in certain structures in the church, but it is not only ecclesial structures that must change," he said, there also must be "a profound change of mentality, attitude and heart in our ways of working with laypeople."

The bishop called for the appointment of pastoral teams of clergy and laypeople to administer parishes, for a formal recognition of "lay ecclesial ministers," and for a "deliberate and systematic involvement and leadership of women at all levels of church life."

When church life is marked by "co-responsibility," Bishop Dunn said, "the Gospel will be heard anew, our faith will be passed on more effectively, we will be renewed in our faith and our witness will become more authentic."

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