



## BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

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Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary

His Holiness, Pope Francis  
Apostolic Palace  
Vatican City

Most Holy Father,

I am writing in the light of the terrible scandals of the abuse of minors by clergy revealed by the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report. To these can be added the scandals in Chile, Australia, Ireland and now here in England too, in light of the Independent Investigation into Child Sexual Abuse. Clerical sex abuse seems to be a world-wide phenomenon in the Church. As a Catholic and a Bishop, these revelations fill me with deep sorrow and shame. I pray for the healing of the poor victims. I pray for the forgiveness of the perpetrators. I pray too for myself, and for all our clergy and people, that by our penance we will grow in holiness.

I wanted to make a constructive suggestion. Would it be possible to call an Extraordinary Synod on the Life and Ministry of Clergy? The Synod might begin with a 'congress,' attended by the bishops but formed of laity and others expert in the clergy abuse scandals and in the safeguarding of children and the vulnerable. The fruits of this could then be taken forward into a Synod of Bishops proper. I suggest the Synod be devoted to the identity of being a priest/bishop, to devising guidance on life-style and supports for celibacy, to proposing a rule of life for priests/bishops and to establishing appropriate forms of priestly/episcopal accountability and supervision. Canon Law could then be revised in the light of the outcomes and each Diocese be required to apply it by developing its own *Directory for Clergy*.

As a Bishop, I seem to have few tools to facilitate the day to day management of clergy. For example, when I was a seminary formator, we spent several years devising a balanced system of annual assessments and scrutiny, based on *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, to help an individual student take responsibility for his formation. By contrast, once ordained, priests/bishops have few formal on-going assessments or ministerial supervision. It ought to be possible to devise mechanisms to help bishops in their responsibilities towards clergy and to help clergy realise they are not 'lone operatives' but ministers accountable to the direction and leadership of the diocese - *nihil sine episcopo*.

Most Holy Father, please be assured of my prayers for you in your daunting ministry. I look forward to meeting you soon for the *Ad Limina*.

In Corde Iesu

+Philip

Bishop of Portsmouth