

Insert for parish newsletters for Masses on weekend of 19 and 20 March 2011

The first anniversary of the publication of the *Pastoral Letter of Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland* occurs on 19 March 2010. To mark this anniversary Irish bishops wish to bring the following three important initiatives to the attention of the faithful: the publication of their pastoral response *Towards Healing and Renewal*; the new Catholic counselling and support service for survivors of abuse; and, the progress of listening and consultation exercises which have been taking place.

To mark this first anniversary bishops have published the pastoral response *Towards Healing and Renewal*. This outlines different undertakings that the bishops are making on the journey emphasised by the survivors of abuse. These steps include:

Prayer for the Survivors

of Abuse, including a commitment on the part of bishops to dedicate each First Friday to prayer and fasting in reparation for abuse and the failure to address it adequately; a

commitment to listening

with sensitivity and care to the experiences of those who suffered abuse;

spiritual support

to survivors of abuse who wish to avail themselves of it, including the opportunity for spiritual direction; ongoing commitment to

creating a safer future for children

in the Church in accordance with

Safeguarding Children

; a

review

of Dioceses, Religious Congregations and Societies by the National Board for Safeguarding Children; and ongoing

financial support for the work of safeguarding

and care.

Towards Healing and Renewal

also includes ways in which parish communities can play their part in assisting the process of healing for survivors of abuse.

In February 2011 bishops, the Conference of Religious of Ireland and the Irish Missionary Union have launched a new Catholic counselling and support service. This counselling service, which continues the important work of *Faoiseamh*, supports survivors of abuse in a professional and caring environment by providing a wide range of services, including Helpline and face-to-face Counselling. Healing Meetings, Group Work, Practical Workshops and a Social Worker/Bridging service designed to link survivors of abuse to other services relevant to their needs, such as the health, local authority, educational and social welfare services.

Over the last year, and prompted by Pope Benedict's *Pastoral Letter*, listening and consultation exercises have been taking place in dioceses. These are continuing and are an important step on the journey of healing and renewal for the Church in Ireland.