

# Church response to modern abuse scandals 'same as 30 years ago'

Marie Collins claims lessons of abuse in Ireland not being used to change policy elsewhere

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[Patsy McGarry](#)



Marie Collins: 'The church reaction is a mirror image of what we were hearing here in Ireland 30 years ago.' File photograph: Alessandro Bianchi/Reuters

As the scandal of clerical child sex abuse emerges in other countries across the world the [Catholic Church](#) response in each has been exactly as it was in [Ireland](#) decades ago, Dublin abuse survivor [Marie Collins](#) has said.

"The church reaction is a mirror image of what we were hearing here in Ireland 30 years ago. I spoke recently with someone from [Poland](#) where the crisis is just now breaking. There the bishops are saying it is 'enemies of the church' who are behind it. It is an aggressive 'media with an anti-church agenda', all very familiar and an absolutely disgraceful attitude in 2019," she said.

"The experience from those countries where the abuse crisis has been faced is not being used to bring universal policies into place for the countries where it has yet to occur," she said.

"The sleeping mandarins in leadership in our church seem to feel if they turn a blind eye it will stay hidden and they will not have to deal with it. While they look away children are being hurt," she said.

Ms Collins is a former member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors set up by [Pope Francis](#).

She was speaking at a meeting of the liberal We Are Church Ireland group in Dublin on Monday. She also warned against complacency gaining ground in Ireland in relation to abuse. While it was true better safeguarding had been put in place by church and State in Ireland “this only came about because of the outrage among the people and the pressure due to horrific revelations of abuse and its deliberate cover up by the institution,” she said.

In Ireland and other countries where the issue was being addressed “we see the church reacting with improved processes because they have had to be seen to be doing something,” but there was “still a long way to go and we need to realise this,” she said. In those countries where the abuse issue was being addressed “the church has not acted proactively only reactively,” she said.

Last August, when she met Pope Francis in Dublin, she asked him why he allowed a tribunal he supported, and which would have held bishops to account on the abuse issue, to be dropped by the [Roman Curia](#).

He said “bishops could not all be held to the same standard. Allowances had to be made for their cultural difference and their different understandings. This meant, he said, that they needed to be judged in their own area not centrally in the [Vatican](#). ”

She “challenged him on this saying the church should have a standard of safeguarding to which every leader must be held. Children should be as well protected in the church in [Africa](#) or [India](#) as in America or Ireland. Canon law is universal – Catholic doctrine is universal – safeguarding should be universal.”

It was her view “that if there are things acceptable in local culture that would not be acceptable in other areas of the world then it is up to the church to raise the standard and educate, not to lower their standards”.

While “we must respect people’s culture we must also respect the rights of the child,” she said, The Holy See has signed the UN declaration on the Rights of the Child – it is about time they recognised its provision universally and not see it as only referring to the tiny [Vatican City](#), ” she said.

As to next month’s meeting of Catholic primates in Rome to discuss the abuse issue, she feared that at its conclusion “we will be assured that things are moving forward and there will be promises for the future. But we will see little in the way of on-paper concrete committed action plans.”

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