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Mary Kelly and Pauline Kenny pictured with Bishop Christopher Jones at the celebrations held recently at Cuisle Donamon, to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Irish Wheelchair Association.



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Bishop Jones welcomes Pope's pastoral letter

Bishop of Elphin, Christopher Jones this week welcomed the publication of a pastoral letter from Pope Benedict to the Catholics of Ireland.

Reacting to the pastoral letter, which was to be read out at all Masses in Catholic Churches last weekend, Bishop Jones said, "I welcome the publication of the Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI as an important moment in the process of definitively dealing with difficulties in the Catholic Church in Ireland in relation to the issue of child abuse and of bringing healing to victims and their families.

"On the advice of individuals who have themselves been abused in childhood, I am conscious that any initiative or discussion of this kind may reawaken their pain but for the sake of everyone concerned it is my hope that this Apostolic Letter may become a catalyst for the process of healing for which we long.

"I have asked all priests in the Diocese of Elphin to introduce the letter to their congregations at Masses this Sunday and to make it widely available to people throughout the diocese in the coming days so that every one may read and reflect on the text first hand.

"I believe that the response to this letter and any plans to move forward must come not just from myself, priests and religious but from the whole people of the diocese. After time has been

given to reading and reflecting on the letter, I intend to consult with the newly constituted diocesan pastoral council which has representatives of laity and clergy from throughout the diocese with a view to initiating a prayerful listening process involving every parish in the diocese. My hope is that this will lead to a practical and fruitful response and to a healing of the past and a better future more faithful to the Gospel.

"Let me reiterate my commitment to dealing comprehensively with the deeds and hurt of the past, which was at times compounded by failures in the church's response. We must build up confidence among those suffering from abuse that they will find a compassionate listening ear in the church and that they will trust our resolve to be open, transparent and fully co-operative with the civil authorities in dealing with allegations or concerns of abuse by church personnel. We must do our utmost to help in the process of healing the pain of those who have been abused and their families. We must ensure that we have the resolve and robust structures to make the church environment a safe place for all our children.

"Finally, I as Bishop wish to take this opportunity to offer once again my wholehearted apology to all the victims and their families who have suffered as a result of abuse by church personnel."