

Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God



August 20, 2018

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor 12:26). These words of Saint Paul forcefully echo in my heart as I acknowledge once more the suffering endured by many minors due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons. Crimes that inflict deep wounds of pain and powerlessness, primarily among the victims, but also in their family members and in the larger community of believers and nonbelievers alike. Looking back to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient. Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated. The pain of the victims and their families is also our pain, and so it is urgent that we once more reaffirm our commitment to ensure the protection of minors and of vulnerable adults.

1. *If one member suffers...*

In recent days, a report was made public which detailed the experiences of at least a thousand survivors, victims of sexual abuse, the abuse of power and of conscience at the hands of priests over a period of approximately seventy years. Even though it can be said

that most of these cases belong to the past, nonetheless as time goes on we have come to know the pain of many of the victims. We have realized that these wounds never disappear and that they require us forcefully to condemn these atrocities and join forces in uprooting this culture of death; these wounds never go away. The heart-wrenching pain of these victims, which cries out to heaven, was long ignored, kept quiet or silenced. But their outcry was more powerful than all the measures meant to silence it, or sought even to resolve it by decisions that increased its gravity by falling into complicity. The Lord heard that cry and once again showed us on which side he stands. Mary's song is not mistaken and continues quietly to echo throughout history. For the Lord remembers the promise he made to our fathers: "he has scattered the proud in their conceit; he has cast down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty" (**Lk 1:51-53**). We feel shame when we realize that our style of life has denied, and continues to deny, the words we recite.

With shame and repentance, we acknowledge as an ecclesial community that we were not where we should have been, that we did not act in a timely manner, realizing the magnitude and the gravity of the damage done to so many lives. We showed no care for the little ones; we abandoned them. I make my own the words of the then Cardinal Ratzinger when, during the Way of the Cross composed for Good Friday 2005, he identified with the cry of pain of so many victims and exclaimed: "How much filth there is in the Church, and even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to [Christ]! How much pride, how much self-complacency! Christ's betrayal by his disciples, their unworthy reception of his body and blood, is certainly the greatest suffering endured by the Redeemer; it pierces his heart. We can only call to him from the depths of our hearts: ***Kyrie eleison – Lord, save us!*** (cf. **Mt 8:25**)" (**Ninth Station**).

2. ... all suffer together with it

The extent and the gravity of all that has happened requires coming to grips with this reality in a comprehensive and communal way. While it is important and necessary on every journey of conversion to acknowledge the truth of what has happened, in itself this is not enough. Today we are challenged as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit. If, in the past, the response was one of omission, today we want solidarity, in the deepest and most challenging sense, to become our way of forging present and future history. And this in an environment where conflicts, tensions and above all the victims of every type of abuse can encounter an outstretched

hand to protect them and rescue them from their pain (cf. **Evangelii Gaudium, 228**). Such solidarity demands that we in turn condemn whatever endangers the integrity of any person. A solidarity that summons us to fight all forms of corruption, especially spiritual corruption. The latter is "a comfortable and self-satisfied form of blindness. Everything then appears acceptable: deception, slander, egotism and other subtle forms of self-centeredness, for 'even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light' (**2 Cor 11:14**)" (**Gaudete et Exsultate, 165**). Saint Paul's exhortation to suffer with those who suffer is the best antidote against all our attempts to repeat the words of Cain: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (**Gen 4:9**).

I am conscious of the effort and work being carried out in various parts of the world to come up with the necessary means to ensure the safety and protection of the integrity of children and of vulnerable adults, as well as implementing zero tolerance and ways of making all those who perpetrate or cover up these crimes accountable. We have delayed in applying these actions and sanctions that are so necessary, yet I am confident that they will help to guarantee a greater culture of care in the present and future.

Together with those efforts, every one of the baptized should feel involved in the ecclesial and social change that we so greatly need. This change calls for a personal and communal conversion that makes us see things as the Lord does. For as Saint John Paul II liked to say: "If we have truly started out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he wished to be identified" (**Novo Millennio Ineunte, 49**). To see things as the Lord does, to be where the Lord wants us to be, to experience a conversion of heart in his presence. To do so, prayer and penance will help. I invite the entire holy faithful People of God to a **penitential exercise of prayer and fasting**, following the Lord's command.¹ This can awaken our conscience and arouse our solidarity and commitment to a culture of care that says "never again" to every form of abuse.

It is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God's People. Indeed, whenever we have tried to replace, or silence, or ignore, or reduce the People of God to small elites, we end up creating communities, projects, theological approaches, spiritualities and structures without roots, without memory, without faces, without bodies and ultimately, without lives.² This is clearly seen in a peculiar way of understanding the Church's authority, one common in many communities where sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience have occurred. Such is the case with clericalism, an approach that "not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people".³ Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say "no" to abuse is to say an emphatic "no" to all forms of clericalism.

It is always helpful to remember that "in salvation history, the Lord saved one people. We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people. That is why no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual. Rather, God draws us to himself, taking into account the complex fabric of interpersonal relationships present in the human community. God wanted to enter into the life and history of a people" (**Gaudete et Exsultate, 6**). Consequently, the only way that we have to respond to this evil that has darkened so many lives is to experience it as a task regarding all of us as the People of God. This awareness of being part of a people and a shared history will enable us to acknowledge our past sins and mistakes with a penitential openness that can allow us to be renewed from within. Without the active participation of all the Church's members, everything being done to uproot the culture of abuse in our communities will not be successful in generating the necessary dynamics for sound and realistic change. The penitential dimension of fasting and prayer will help us as God's People to come before the Lord and our wounded brothers and sisters as sinners imploring forgiveness and the grace of shame and conversion. In this way, we

will come up with actions that can generate resources attuned to the Gospel. For “whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel,

new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world”(**Evangelii Gaudium, 11**).

It is essential that we, as a Church, be able to acknowledge and condemn, with sorrow and shame, the atrocities perpetrated by consecrated persons, clerics, and all those entrusted with the mission of watching over and caring for those most vulnerable. Let us beg forgiveness for our own sins and the sins of others. An awareness of sin helps us to acknowledge the errors, the crimes and the wounds caused in the past and allows us, in the present, to be more open and committed along a journey of renewed conversion.

Likewise, penance and prayer will help us to open our eyes and our hearts to other people’s sufferings and to overcome the thirst for power and possessions that are so often the root of those evils. May fasting and prayer open our ears to the hushed pain felt by children, young people and the disabled. A fasting that can make us hunger and thirst for justice and impel us to walk in the truth, supporting all the judicial measures that may be necessary. A fasting that shakes us up and leads us to be committed in truth and charity with all men and women of good will, and with society in general, to combatting all forms of the abuse of power, sexual abuse and the abuse of conscience.

In this way, we can show clearly our calling to be “a sign and instrument of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race” (**Lumen Gentium, 1**).

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it”, said Saint Paul. By an attitude of prayer and penance, we will become attuned as individuals and as a community to this exhortation, so that we may grow in the gift of compassion, in justice, prevention and reparation. Mary chose to stand at the foot of her Son’s cross. She did so unhesitatingly, standing firmly by Jesus’ side. In this way, she reveals the way she lived her entire life. When we experience the desolation caused by these ecclesial wounds, we will do well, with Mary, “to insist more upon prayer”, seeking to grow all the more in love and fidelity to the Church (**SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, Spiritual Exercises, 319**). She, the first of the disciples, teaches all of us as disciples how we are to halt before the sufferings of the innocent, without excuses or cowardice. To look to Mary is to discover the model of a true follower of Christ.

May the Holy Spirit grant us the grace of conversion and the interior anointing needed to express before these crimes of abuse our compunction and our resolve courageously to combat them.

Vatican City, 20 August 2018
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Letter from Cardinal Blase J. Cupich to the People of the Archdiocese of Chicago in Response to the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



August 17, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Anger, shock, grief, shame. What other words can we summon to describe the experience of learning about the devastating revelations of sexual abuse — and the failures of bishops to safeguard the children entrusted to their care — published in the Pennsylvania grand jury report, released Tuesday? This catalogue of horrors comes on the heels of news accounts of deeply disturbing sexual-abuse and harassment allegations against Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, who recently resigned from the College of Cardinals. And yet whatever words we may use to describe the anguish of reading about these heinous acts, they can never capture the reality of suffering endured by victims of sexual abuse, suffering compounded by the woeful responses of bishops who failed to protect the people they were ordained to serve. As the Holy See put it in its August 16 statement on the grand jury report: “The church must learn hard lessons from its past, and there should be accountability for both abusers and those who permitted abuse to occur.”

I know that many of you are asking: How could this be happening again? Didn't the U.S. bishops address this crisis sixteen years ago when they met in Dallas? What are they doing now, and why should we trust that this time they will do the right thing?

These are precisely the questions that ought to be asked. As a former chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People, I have asked them myself. And sorrow, disgust, outrage — these are righteous feelings, the stirrings of the conscience of a people scandalized by the terrible reality that too many of the men who promised to protect their children, and strengthen their faith, have been responsible for wounding both.

We know this not only because of the admirable work of the many members of the news media who played an essential role in bringing this crisis into the light. Now, we have been made to face these scandals first and foremost by the courage of victim-survivors — the men and woman who found the strength, even when doing so meant suffering again

unimaginable pain, to come forward and seek justice from an institution that grievously failed them.

What are we bishops doing now to ensure that those failures are not repeated? Today, USCCB President Cardinal Daniel DiNardo announced on behalf of all the bishops that our conference will launch a thorough investigation of the allegations against Archbishop McCarrick; that it will establish new ways in which people can report complaints against bishops; and that it will advocate for more effective resolution of such allegations. The USCCB will invite the Holy See to investigate the McCarrick case, in concert with a predominantly lay group of experts.

The bishops will also update our 2002 “Statement of Episcopal Commitment” by which the bishops pledged to follow a procedure for reporting allegations of sexual abuse of minors by a bishop.

This document needs revision to clarify how victims can report abuse of minors or other misconduct by bishops, as well as develop third-party reporting systems, many of which are already being looked at today. Of course, bishops are not exempt from following standards of behavior. Our own Cardinal Joseph Bernardin provided a strong example, when he chose to step aside after he was accused of abuse — a charge that was eventually retracted.

The USCCB will also press for procedures that will make it easier to resolve complaints against bishops in a timely, fair, and transparent manner.

As Cardinal DiNardo explained, all this will be conducted with “proper independence, sufficient authority, and substantial leadership by laity.” This call for lay oversight of the investigation, as much as the scandal itself, shows the need for systemic change in the way we order church life. The clericalist mindset, responsible for so much of the scandal, must be purged from church life. As Pope Francis has urged, we need to remember that it is our baptism that unites us. We as a church must reflect more deeply on what we share in common, rather than what distinguishes us.

The abuses contained in the Pennsylvania grand jury report are, as you know, appallingly familiar. And while it is true that the vast majority of abuses contained in that report occurred decades ago, that is of no comfort to victims, nor should it be to any of us. We cannot say this enough: the abuses should never have happened, and no one should have acted in ways that enabled them. This is why, following the 2002 wave of scandals, the USCCB adopted policies designed to protect young people from abusers. We instituted a zero-tolerance policy which holds that even one instance of child sexual abuse would bar someone from the priesthood forever. The Archdiocese of Chicago has implemented these policies and even done more.

1. We established an independent lay-majority review board to consider allegations against clergy and make recommendations to the bishops.

2. We refer all allegations of abuse to civil authorities.
3. We require diocesan employees and volunteers to undergo background checks.
4. We mandate that all diocesan employees and volunteers undergo safe-environment training to help them identify predatory behavior and understand avenues of reporting. And we required that children be taught how to recognize, resist and report abuse.
5. We undergo an annual audit to measure compliance with these policies, which every year has found the Archdiocese of Chicago compliant.

Since 2002, hundreds of thousands of our people in dioceses across the United States have undergone safe-environment training. In many ways we can say that the policies of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which established procedures for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy, have been successful. According to the Pennsylvania grand jury report, for example, just two of the 300 priests named in the text were accused within the past decade, and both were reported to civil authorities. This excuses nothing, and we can never become complacent about our responsibility to protect children and adults from abuse and harassment, but it does say something about the effects of our post-2002 policies.

Here in the Archdiocese of Chicago, we have been following procedures that were first established by Cardinal Bernardin in 1992, following revelations of clergy abuse that came to light during that period. In addition to what the Charter calls for, we offer payment for counseling or other assistance to anyone who comes to us with allegations even before attempting to establish the credibility of the claim. After any civil investigation has concluded, we conduct our own inquiry into allegations against priests, and our majority-lay review board considers the case and makes a recommendation to me about whether the accused should remain in ministry. One of the most important things Cardinal Bernardin did was to establish a regular meeting of everyone who might be called in to consider a case of sexual abuse, whether it involves a minor or an adult. So, to this day, representatives from across the relevant pastoral center offices regularly meet with me to advise me on cases that arise and ways to strengthen our commitments.

Of course, no set of procedures is perfect. As the grand jury report illustrates, they are subject to the strengths and weaknesses of those entrusted to carry them out. Closed systems always tend toward self-protection; it is only when we create systems of accountability that we let in purifying light. That's what our practices are designed to do. They exist because we as a church have a grave responsibility to ensure the safety of our people. That is why I encourage anyone who has been victimized to contact our Office of Protection of Children and Youth at 800.994.6200 or protect.archchicago.org.

Anger, shock, grief, shame. There is one other word that we bishops must summon: resolve. We must resolve to face our failures and hold each other accountable. We must resolve to be clear-eyed about what we have done, what we have failed to do, and what remains to be done. We must resolve to live in the light of humility, of repentance, of honesty — the light of Christ. As your bishop, I pledge to continue holding firm to that resolve. And I ask for you to pray for all victims of abuse. I also invite you to review what I have written here and make suggestions for improving our safe-environment standards,

ever heeding the Second Vatican Council's "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," which called on the laity, "by reason of the knowledge, competence or outstanding ability which they may enjoy ... to express their opinion on those things which concern the good of the church."

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Cardinal Blase J. Cupich
Archbishop of Chicago

St. Pius X-Fr. Tony Markus

I ask that we pray:

For all victims and their families to find strength and healing from their pain, betrayal, and disappointment

For Church leaders to have the wisdom and courage to hold accountable those responsible for this betrayal of trust

For the grace and strength of the Holy Spirit to help us persevere in faith

For the people of St. Pius X to continue to trust in the work of God and remain a part of our faith community.

Together we can come together in prayer and work to repair the betrayal and disappointment that we are experiencing at this time.

Yours in Christ