



DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

August 21, 2018
The Memorial of Saint Pius X
(P: August 4, 1903-August 20, 1914)

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Jesus Christ:

Peace be with you!

"The pain and shame we feel at the sins of some members of the Church, and at our own, must never make us forget how many Christians are giving their lives in love."

Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, #76

As I have said many times, the terrible reality of Catholic Priests sexually abusing children is the greatest crisis in the history of the Catholic Church in the United States. It is a crisis because of the grave crime and the grave sin of the sexual abuse of children and because the response of the leadership of the Catholic Church has, in some cases, not been swift and effective. More than that, there have been instances in which Bishops have ignored, rejected, or even concealed credible evidence of sexual abuse by members of the clergy.

This crisis has led to profoundly painful experiences for everyone in the Catholic Church, but most importantly, in the lives of the abuse victims and their families. It has also had a significant impact on the morale of the majority of priests who are not guilty of such heinous offenses. As a result, growing numbers of Catholic people feel alienated from the Catholic Church which is, and should always be, the Sacrament of the encounter with Jesus Christ.

We have recently learned that 88-year-old Theodore McCarrick, the former Cardinal Archbishop of Washington, D.C., has been credibly accused of sexually abusing minors when he was a young priest. We have also learned from the August 14, 2018, Pennsylvania Grand Jury finding that in six Catholic Dioceses in the state, over a period of 70 years (dating back to 1947), over 300 priests were credibly accused of sexually abusing more than a thousand minors and, in some cases, individual Bishops concealed these crimes and did not report them to law enforcement. These deeply disturbing events not only cause anger, frustration, disappointment, and bewilderment in the minds and hearts of Catholic laity and clergy, they also force us to face an obvious truth. Every ordained minister of the Church, like every baptized lay person, is a redeemed sinner in need of God's merciful love and forgiveness. There are no perfect Priests and no perfect Bishops, just as there are no perfect Christians.

In our own Diocese, we are continuing to feel the effects of the fact that nearly 15 years ago, 15 priests were removed from their ministry because of credible child sexual abuse

allegations made against them. As a member of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People, I have followed this unfolding crisis with great attention, concern, and prayer. I will continue to make every effort to make sure that no such immoral actions occur in the Diocese of Belleville in the years ahead. Representatives of the Bishops of the United States are in conversation with the Holy See to find appropriate ways of holding accountable the Bishops accused of sexual abuse themselves or of concealing abuse committed by others. We faithfully follow all the requirements for child protection and safety in our parishes, schools, and other institutions. Our policy is that any Priest coming into the Diocese for any pastoral activity must provide a testimonial of suitability from his home Diocese or religious community. I remind everyone in the Diocese that if you seriously believe that a member of the clergy has sexually abused a minor, or if you yourself have been abused, you have an obligation first of all to report this to civil authorities and second of all to report this to the Diocese of Belleville making use of our Abuse Hotline at: 1-800-640-3044. You may do this anonymously if you wish. At the same time, I urge you to continue to support, encourage, and pray for the good and holy Priests who faithfully serve you every day. Our faith, as Catholics, is not rooted in our belief in Priests, Bishops, or the Holy Father, himself. Our faith is rooted in our belief in the power of the Holy Spirit revealing the mystery of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That faith is lived out by imperfect Christians in the sacramental life of the Church which supports us in our journey from God to God. Nevertheless, with you, I acknowledge that this deep faith can be shaken by the fact that some Priests and Bishops, who are teachers of the faith, have betrayed the trust that you, and especially your children, have placed in them.

His Holiness, Pope Francis, has been deeply distressed and challenged by this crisis. He was visibly shaken when he learned about the widespread sexual abuse of minors in Chile, and he acknowledged that he had not responded sufficiently when he was informed that a Chilean Bishop had concealed sexual abuse. He has announced that on his Pastoral Visit to the Catholic Church in Dublin, Ireland (August 25-27, 2018), he will meet personally with individuals who were abused during their youth. Responding directly to the Pennsylvania Grand Jury findings, the Pontiff has written a personal letter to the Christian Faithful all over the world. I ask that this letter be inserted in your parish bulletins this weekend, placed on your parish websites, and shared with the Principals, teachers and faculty members of our elementary and secondary Catholic schools. I also ask the Celebrant of this Mass to read the letter of the Roman Pontiff to you in its entirety so that you will hear the words of the Bishop of Rome himself. Please take the Holy Father's letter home with you, read it over, discuss it with your family members and friends, and pray about its contents. Even though this letter from the Vatican is unprecedented, it is only a step in what will necessarily be a long road to forgiveness, healing, and spiritual renewal in the Catholic Church. I invite every one of you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, to join me in fervent and frequent prayer for conversion in the life of the Church.

Saint John Marie Vianney, Curé d'Ars, Patron Saint of Parish Priests, PRAY FOR US

Our Lady Help of Christians, PRAY FOR US!

Prayerfully yours in Christ,



The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville