



August 20, 2018

Dear Clergy, Religious and Lay Faithful of the Archdiocese of Portland,

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Like many of you, I was shocked, angered, and discouraged by the recent revelations concerning former Cardinal and retired Archbishop of Washington, D.C., Theodore McCarrick. Then, on the eve of the Feast of the Assumption of our Blessed Mother, came the release of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report on clergy sex abuse in six Pennsylvania dioceses, covering more than seven decades. These horrific revelations are particularly painful in light of what victims in our own Archdiocese have suffered and the impact that sexual abuse has had on the Church here in western Oregon. I am sorry beyond words for the harm that has been done.

I know many of you have awaited a response from me regarding these recent scandalous events. This delay should not in any way communicate a lack of concern or the seriousness with which I take these grave revelations. I must tell you that I have been shaken to the core of my soul over them. My first response was anger and disgust, which many of you have also experienced. But I needed to take time to prayerfully reflect on what is coming to light and respond in a way that comes deeply from my prayer and discernment. I did not want to respond from a public relations or legalistic perspective, but as a pastor of souls. If my delay has caused hurt or frustration, I am sorry.

On this same date, our Holy Father Pope Francis has himself written to the People of God, addressing this horrific situation in the Church. I urge all of the faithful of the Archdiocese of Portland to read his words, in which he calls out those responsible, and also calls for conversion, penance and prayer. He rightly calls what has happened part of the “culture of death.”

These most-recent accusations and details expose - yet again - certain systematic and profound failures of episcopal leadership in our Church. These failures are both institutional and spiritual in nature, and date back many decades.



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First, it is an institutional failure for the Church, in that this is not just a matter of a refusal to follow policies or of negligent oversight; but rather, at least in Archbishop McCarrick's case, that someone entrusted with pastoral responsibility and care could, apparently, act in such a heinously sinful and criminal manner. It is also an institutional failure that someone like this could rise to such a high level unimpeded and without being challenged or held accountable. As for the Grand Jury report, amidst the sordid and graphic descriptions of clerical sex abuse it tells of yet more examples of Church leaders covering up, keeping quiet or looking the other way when confronted with allegations of evil among their own.

All of these allegations should have been brought to light much sooner; and then dealt with swiftly, justly, *and transparently*.

Second, the tragedy of clerical sex abuse is a profound spiritual failure; and especially so when someone called to be a good shepherd, to live a holy and chaste life consecrated to Christ and his people, and to serve as Jesus served, acts in such a gravely sinful, evil manner.

If bishops, clergy and religious lose the personal relationship with God to which we are all called, careerism, clericalism and ways of life at odds with the Gospel often result. This diminishes or quenches the flame of love and life in Christ that we must have in serving the People of God. We can become spiritual operators, or worse, perpetrators of serious harm to others.

I must also say that this is a spiritual and moral crisis, even a crisis of faith. While not in ANY WAY diminishing the responsibility and culpability of those who engaged in sinful, immoral and illegal acts, including bishops who failed in their duty, this is - at its heart - the work of the Evil One. Satan "prowls throughout the world, seeking the ruin of souls" and we must battle against his wickedness and snares. (Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel). The Church has traditionally taught that temptation to sin comes from three sources: the world, the flesh and the Evil One. In a cultural climate that has grown ever more immoral, especially in the area of sexual morality, Satan has preyed upon the weaknesses of men who sacramentally represent Christ, which undermines the credibility of the Church, his enemy in the world. And far too many have succumbed to his temptations, and they must be held accountable.



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In the face of this spiritual and moral crisis, we must all look to our own spiritual life and commitment. In the history of the Church, whenever there was a moral or spiritual crisis, God has raised up saints who became agents of reform. This is a time for saints. I have examined my own spiritual life, and I have prayerfully come to the conclusion that I must myself get even more serious about my prayer, penance and sacrifice. I call for a profound spiritual renewal among our clergy. I will address this crisis personally with our priests and seminarians, but in the meantime I urge priests to rededicate themselves to prayer and penance for the good of the people entrusted to our care. I remind priests of their solemn obligation to pray, especially the Liturgy of the Hours, faithfully every day. I urge them to a daily holy hour in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. I urge them to pray daily the Holy Rosary of our Blessed Mother. I urge them to do penance and reparation for these sins, even those who live chastely and in a manner worthy of their calling in Christ. This is a responsibility we all share. We who are clergy must reject all tendencies toward a worldliness and secularity that is inconsistent with our vocation.

As Pope Francis has asked in his letter, all of the People of God should pray and do penance for healing in the Body of Christ. I realize that the lay faithful are not responsible for this scandal, but as members of the communion of the Church, our prayers and sacrifices are very powerful in helping ward off this evil in our midst.

So, now what?

Our first priority must always be the care and support of victims of abuse. Even though we may be outraged at what has happened, in our pursuit of justice we must not and cannot forget those who are victims. They need our prayers, compassion, assistance, and encouragement. I really want to emphasize this point. Whatever we do as a Church to address these atrocities, we must keep in mind those who have been seriously harmed. They have suffered greatly at the hands of those they should have been able to count on for spiritual care and support and in whom they should have experienced the love of the Good Shepherd. We must keep them in the forefront of our concern, assistance and prayers. The way forward must include concrete actions to address their wounds and hold accountable those who have caused them unspeakable harm.



Our second priority must be to rectify the institutional failures that allow such grave offenses to occur. Moving forward, I believe several steps should be strongly considered:

1. While only the Pope has the authority to discipline or remove bishops, we must ensure that bishops be held to the same standards as priests and religious in matters of impropriety and abuse. The Dallas Charter and other policies need to be amended where necessary and wherever possible, with the approval of the Holy See, to make this clear.
2. An outside investigation process, with the substantial involvement of lay people who are independent experts in their respective fields, needs to be available for these situations. A body investigating itself does not inspire confidence in the objectivity of the outcome. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has invited the Vatican to conduct an Apostolic Visitation to address this crisis in concert with a group of predominantly lay people identified for their expertise by members of the National Review Board and empowered to act.
3. Investigations should also cover those who knew of reprehensible behavior and yet said little, did nothing, or aided and abetted a perpetrator's activities. All those responsible must be held accountable.
4. All reports of misbehavior or abuse must be properly investigated. They must never be summarily dismissed, ignored, or hidden. They must be dealt with, expeditiously and transparently.

I want to assure all of the faithful of the Archdiocese of Portland that I have heard your anger, disgust, disappointment, and frustration loud and clear. I will carry all of this with me in my heart when the U.S. Bishops gather in November at our annual meeting, where I will be a strong advocate for the reforms and concrete actions which must take place.

For our part, the Archdiocese of Portland renews its pledge to conduct itself in a manner worthy of the call of Christ for the sake of the faithful and the good of all people. This Archdiocese went through an incredibly difficult time in the wake of the 2002 revelations of sexual abuse in the Church, leading us into bankruptcy. We have in place solid and extensive policies and concrete procedures to help protect children, young people and vulnerable adults from future abuse. We also have strong policies and procedures for the reporting of sexual abuse. We have an archdiocesan office for Child Protection and Victim Assistance that helps us pastorally care for those who have been abused.



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The Archdiocese renews its commitment to address swiftly, justly, and transparently all improper sexual behavior by ministers and those in positions of authority in the Church. We also pledge our continued support and care for the victims of abuse. The whole People of God in this archdiocese are also suffering greatly in light of these new revelations. Our care and concern must also address their hurt and anger.

I personally invite, and even urge, anyone who has been abused by a member of the clergy, religious, or lay employee or volunteer to please come forward with your complaint either to our Office of Victim Assistance or to your local law enforcement officials. We want to help you.

In dealing with all of this some are quite understandably tempted to give up on the Church. Yet our faith is finally in God, not in individuals who fail to live up to their calling in Christ. Jesus was betrayed and abandoned, yet he was faithful to his Father and to his people through it all. He will remain so.

Please pray for those who have been victims of sexual abuse, that they may receive healing, support, and peace. Also, pray for those who have pastoral responsibilities in the Church, that they may be true and good shepherds after Jesus' own heart. And let us all seek to live lives of faith, service, mercy, and holiness so that the light of Christ in us may shine brightly in our world.

May the Good Shepherd always walk beside you and bless your work and ministry.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Rev. Alexander K. Sample