

# THE BASILICA OF SAINT MARY



August 16, 2018

Dear Parishioners:

Lately it has been hard to be a Catholic. A few weeks ago we heard of multiple accusations of sexually inappropriate behavior against former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. More recently, a grand jury in Pennsylvania released a report about the widespread sexual abuse of children by priests in six dioceses in Pennsylvania. In regard to former Cardinal McCarrick, the accusations go as far back as his time as a newly ordained priest. In regard to the grand jury report, it listed credible allegations of sexual abuse of children by 300 priests over a period of 70 years. In each case, those who were in positions to do something either chose not to, or simply looked the other way. This was not just bad decision making. Those individuals bear both legal and moral culpability for their inaction. In the face of this situation, it would seem that there is very little I, or any other priest or bishop, could or should say. And yet to say nothing could be misconstrued as acquiescence to or acceptance of this situation. Given this, I would like to offer the following thoughts.

1. First and foremost, we must be clear and unmistakable in our absolute condemnation of the sexual abuse of children. There is no excuse to be made for it and no defense to be offered for those who would victimize a child in this way. When anyone (most particularly a child) is a victim of sexual abuse, we must be clear and unequivocal in our condemnation of this activity. Any attempt to explain or minimize this behavior is quite simply wrong.

When priests or bishops engage in behavior that is sexually abusive or exploitive they cannot, nor should they be shielded from the consequences of their actions. Where illegality has occurred or is suspected, our legal system must be engaged and allowed to function without hindrance. Where actions of Church officials are found to be insufficient or negligent, they also must face the consequences of their actions or inaction.

2. While several Bishops have offered their apologies for the mistakes that occurred in the past and the suffering these mistakes caused, I am deeply disappointed that those Bishops, whose ill-advised decisions to re-assign priest abusers led to the further abuse of children, have not resigned their positions, or if they are already retired, why they haven't publicly acknowledged their failure and begged for forgiveness. Where their actions were illegal they need to be charged. And even if there are no legal repercussions for their actions, for the sake of those who were abused and for the good of the church, I think these bishops need to publicly take responsibility for their actions. While this act in itself will not restore the trust that has been broken, it is a beginning.

3. While acknowledgement of the source and depth of the problem and offering our deepest and most humble apologies are necessary first steps in responding to the victims of sexual abuse, our efforts cannot stop there. When innocent people, most particularly children, have been the victims of sexual abuse we, as a Church, must recognize our responsibility and offer the full measure of our support and

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For in seeking its well-being, you shall find your own." -Jeremiah 29:7*

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assistance to those who have been victimized. Very practically this means that we must offer recompense to victims of sexual abuse in the form of services and monetary compensation. Further, we must ensure that the policies, procedures and safeguards that have been put in place to protect children and vulnerable adults are adhered to strictly. We must also offer programs to help our individuals and parishes grapple with this issue. In this regard, specifically, I would invite you to attend a program here at The Basilica entitled "Restorative Justice as a Path to Healing." It is scheduled for Thursday evening September 20, from 6:30-9:30pm in the lower level of The Basilica.

4. At some point we, as individual Catholics, and as a parish community, are going to need to begin the hard work of forgiveness. I don't know how we will go about this, but for the spiritual health and vitality of our Church, I believe that eventually we will need to forgive those priests who abused children, as well as those bishops and other leaders who allowed this abuse to happen. This is not to say that forgiveness is easy, or that in forgiving we are accepting and/or forgetting the horror of sexual abuse. Rather it is an acknowledgement that, as followers of Jesus, ultimately forgiveness is not optional for us. (Matthew 18:35)

Personally, I find forgiveness to be one of the hardest things that is asked of us as Christians. I do know, though, that with God's grace forgiveness is possible, and that it starts with prayer. Prayer is the essential first ingredient to forgiveness. We need to pray for and with each other, and most particularly for those who brought this stain upon our Church. Certainly prayer cannot change what has happened, but it can have a salving effect on wounded souls and eventually it can bring about healing and peace.

Over the course of the past several years each time new charges of sexual impropriety against a priest has become public, I have been shocked, saddened, and angry. These incidents have been and continue to be a source of great pain and sadness for me. I had hoped that by this time we would have dealt with all the instances of sexual impropriety on the part of priests. Unfortunately, these latest cases have proven this to be a false hope. These cases are a wound from which our church will not soon recover. I do know and believe, though, that in order to move forward, prayer is where we need to begin.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John M. Bauer". The signature is written in a cursive style.

John M. Bauer  
Pastor, The Basilica of Saint Mary

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