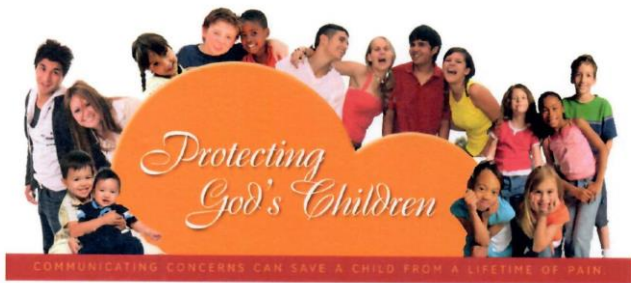




Bits and pieces



(continued) . .



Amid the horror of the events of this past week and past few months, we continue to turn to God . . . work to regain trust . . . restore hope.

This past week, while difficult conversations, we have talked with over 100 of your fellow parishioners. These have been times of great blessing.

I felt it worthwhile to share what was heard and what was said as together, we move toward healing and restoration for the victims of abuse (in particular) and for our whole Church . . . through “accompaniment, communion, accountability and justice”.

➤ **What about the victims? Is this even fixable for them?**

In ALL of the statements/letters issued by the Pope, the United States Conference of

Catholic Bishops, our own Bishop Perez, the VICTIMS are our number ONE priority. There care, wellbeing, healing, wholeness are the number ONE concern, which is why the commitment to “accompany, be in communion” and do all in our power to help them is so critical . . . AND to prevent others from being victimized now and in the future.

We pray and will, as a Church, do all that we can to accomplish this, realizing that while the damage may not always be fully repaired in every case, we will, as a Church, not abandon them.

- **MANY** expressed concerns about the role of Bishops in these scandals; the alleged cover-ups; the ability to “trust”, in particular the Bishops, “ever again”.
 - *The news (McCarrick/Pennsylvania) indicates that the bishops have not done their job nor been transparent*
 - *What will be different so that not only are the perpetrators dealt with but that this does not happen again?*
 - *When will the other shoe drop?*
 - *Have all of the Bishops (in the U.S. . . . perhaps elsewhere) resign and, after thorough investigation, have the Pope decide which ones are worthy to come back.*

In short, people would be well served to read Pope Francis’ “Letter to the People of God”, published 20 August 2018 (see <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-08/pope-francis-letter-people-of-god-sexual-abuse.html>) as well as Cardinal Daniel N. Dinardo’s statement (President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) issued 16 August 2018 (see <http://www.usccb.org/news/2018/18-139.cfm>). You can find links to these and other IMPORTANT documents and information on our Parish Website – www.ourladyofvictory.net. Both of letters/statements (and there are other statements, including from our own Bishop Nelson J. Perez) offer information as to how the American Bishops intend to proceed as well as a glimpse of how Pope Francis is looking to proceed to not only make the healing and restoration of the victims a priority, but take action on not only putting in place what is

necessary to bring an end to this in our Church, but also hold all who are involved, including those who have aided the covering up of these horrendous acts, to accountability and justice and taking action accordingly.

- **Why is this just now coming to light? Why aren't the perpetrators being dealt with? What about the "Statute of Limitations? Why the "cover-up"?**

As to why this is just now coming to "public" light, and "Why the cover up?", those questions and more will be investigated, both from "outside" the Church, as well as "inside" the Church, as the concerns of "mishandling, cover-up, etc." need to be answered so that whatever actions/policies/procedures are not currently in place, ARE PUT IN PLACE, and whatever existing policies/procedures are in place, are adhered to, monitored, and strengthened where needed, and whoever has been complicit in the cover-ups are held accountable and justly dealt with.

ALL in our Church and beyond feel betrayed by what has taken place, but there remains HOPE; HOPE that such horrendous news will not only lead to healing and restoration, but a renewed and better Church. ("upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18)).

Unfortunately (for example, in the Pennsylvania situation), the "Statute of Limitations" currently prevents criminal action being taken in far too many cases. Additionally, many of the accused perpetrators have died. Pennsylvania and many other states are looking to remedy this, but it will take time and a legal process to do so. Until then, the Church must do our part to work with legal authorities to accomplish "accountability and justice" for the victims, of course, and for the perpetrators. (Read Cardinal DiNardo's statement as well as Pope Francis' letter, addressing this very need.)

- **The Bishops and other Church leaders should not be the ones investigating this; we need more laity involved in this.**

In our own Diocese, there is a significant number of laity with particular expertise that form the response and review board dealing not only with any reports of alleged abuse, but also in helping to craft policies and procedures.

Such policies and procedures may be found on our Parish Website (www.ourladyofvictory.net), or on the Diocesan Webpage (Protecting God's Children) <http://www.clevelandchildprotection.org/website/> along with many other valuable resources.

Again, please read Cardinal DiNardo's statement of 16 August 2018 (<http://www.usccb.org/news/2018/18-139.cfm>), who is working to ensure that more laity with particular and necessary expertise are not only engaged in the work of "protecting our children" but are given the necessary independence to act accordingly and when necessary.

The Cardinal's statement also addresses the need for Bishop accountability and a required mechanism to be put in place that will aid in that accomplishing that goal to its proper conclusion without interference, citing that the Pope, currently, is the only one who possesses the authority to discipline and/or remove a Bishop from office. It is the Cardinal's hope that, while respecting that, the Holy See will work with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to develop an appropriate mechanism/policy/procedure to address this.

- **Perhaps if priests were permitted to marry, this would not be happening. Also, is it not the result of homosexual behaviors? Perhaps if we did not have an all-male clergy/run Church, this would not be happening? Why does it seem it is just in the Catholic Church?**

Child sexual abuse is not limited to "unmarried" males or females. Tragically, there are significant incidences of child sexual abuse in what appear to be healthy/traditional family environments with the abuser being a parent or sibling, relative or even trusted neighbor, family friend, and the list goes on. Additionally, there is not a correlation between a homosexual person and child sexual abuse, in other words, being

homosexual does not make an individual more likely to sexually abuse a child. Again, while tragically, in our Church, a significant amount of the child sexual abuse cases have been perpetrated by male clergy, such abusive acts are not limited to male nor female but occur among both genders.

Tragically, this is not just a “Catholic Church” occurrence. Child sexual abuse crosses all areas of society, and must be addressed in all areas and brought to an end.

The Church will not work in isolation on this, but is committed to working with others to not only correct what needs correction in our “house” but hopefully help others in society to develop greater protections and awareness of this evil, and thus eliminate it.

This is a LIFE issue at its core.

- **What are we to tell our young people? How do we explain this to them?**

Not to oversimplify nor diminish, but it is important to note for children and others that the bad actions of an individual or individuals do NOT reflect the actions of many, many other individuals. That is part of the message that should be shared, whether it be about abuse, or any other bad action undertaken by any person.

Again, the Church must take steps to bring healing and restore wholeness to the victims and eliminate this horror, holding accountable the perpetrators and any who have been complicit in covering up these acts, while also pursuing the avenues of justice to their appropriate ends.

Additionally, in our Diocese, in our Parochial Schools as well as our Parish Schools of Religion (ours included), the Diocese has put in place a program (“Praesidium”) intended to covered in all grades (the language changing as the children age) which serves to help “educate” our youngest members on what IS and IS NOT acceptable behavior of others (whether an adult or younger person) toward another; how they are to respond and encouraged to report whenever this might occur.

- **There has been a significant effort in reaching out to people to draw them back to the Church. Will this not drive them away? Do we even need the Church if this is what happens in the Church? Why should I remain in the Church?**

Understandably, the trust of many has been damaged. And some . . . faithful Catholics among them . . . will step away from the Church. We pray this does not happen, but, we also must work to regain their trust in concrete actions.

Additionally, as I continue to pray and reflect, I also believe that this is a time in the Church’s history when we, as a Church, can and must become stronger and better. We have done good and must continue to do good. The Gospel we have been entrusted with is one that is intended to transform lives, never hidden behind to damage lives.

As I shared in last weekend’s Homily:

“There are those who have asked, do ask, will ask, “Why . . . why do you choose to remain Catholic? Why do you choose to continue to be a member of a Church that employs pedophiles . . . that has some in leadership that cover up such horrendous evils? Why?” To which I respond, “Because I believe in Jesus Christ! And that belief means this: If God, the Father, through Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, day in and day out, changes the lifeless gifts of bread and wine into the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ . . . giving these changed gifts to me . . . this Jesus Christ to me . . . me, who am alive . . . then I, too, can be and am changed into this gift that comes to me. And if I can be . . . if I am changed, so can every member of this Church be changed as well, without exception. And I choose to be part of that.” May these words become our words as well.”

- **How do we vet our candidates for Priesthood, Diaconate, Religious Life? Are we doing enough in this area?**

While I do not have specific details, there is an extensive “vetting” and interview process that is in place for any individuals seeking to

enter into ministry in the Church (priesthood, diaconate, lay pastoral ministry, religious life, etc.), Additionally, all potential and/or current employees as well as volunteers (who work with children) must submit to finger printing, criminal background checks, and VIRTUS training. VIRTUS is the program/process used to educate these individuals on how to prevent child sexual abuse, potential signs of its occurrence, reporting protocols, etc.

These protocols have been in place since 2002/2003, and continue to be reviewed/monitored/updated at a minimum, annually. Additionally, each parish/school/institution in the Diocese is to submit an annual report of its compliance with these policies and procedures and the Diocese is required to submit this data and information to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops annually as well.

➤ **What if a priest hears about this in Confession? Should he not report it?**

The “seal of Confession” binds a priest/confessor to confidentiality, meaning anything revealed by a penitent during the Sacrament of Confession cannot be revealed to anyone outside of the Sacrament.

Having said that, as a priest/confessor, I would feel a moral duty and obligation to seek to not only direct the penitent to submit themselves to the appropriate entity for accountability and justice but also to engage with that individual in a conversation outside the Sacrament of Confession that would not be bound by this sacred seal.

➤ **What do we have in place in our Diocese?**

You are encouraged to check the Parish Website which not only lists what is in place in our Diocese for the “Protection of Children”, but also has links to direct you to various documents and additional websites for further information. Visit: www.ourladyofvictory.net.

In addition to what has already been mentioned (significant “vetting” processes and procedures, which do require Fingerprinting, Criminal Background Checks and VIRTUS training, “Praesidium”):

- *“Policy for the Safety of Children in Matters of Sexual Abuse” (access on parish website)*
- *“Standards of Conduct for Ministry” (access on parish website)*

➤ **What assurances are there that this will not just be covered up again?**

“ . . . upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18), becomes, for me, our FIRST assurance. We must hold fast to all that Christ has entrusted us with.

From Pope Francis, on to some other significant and key voices in our Church (Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, Bishop Nelson J. Perez, Bishop Robert Barron, among many as well as key lay leaders and civil authorities and news media), will NOT allow this to go uninvestigated, unresolved, unattended to. Nor should we.

Sincerely yours in ChristFr. Mike