



Office of the Bishop

Dear Priests, Deacons and Diocesan Staff:

I know the horrific stories of the abuse of minors by priests in Pennsylvania that have become public in the last two days sicken you just as much as they sicken me. These are acts which rob the souls and violate the bodies of the innocent in the most brutal way imaginable. Their evil is compounded by the complicity of the leadership of the Church, which magnified abuse in so many instances by placing fear of scandal and a clerical culture above the foundational need to protect minors at all costs.

Every bishop in our land bears a collective debt of guilt for these acts of abuse, and we must work together to forge not only a new structure, but also a new culture within the life of the Church.

The reforms of 2002 were a major foundation for this work of renewal, but this must become a new moment of reform which remedies the gaps in the original charter, specifies and enforces the obligations of bishops in their personal lives and their spiritual leadership roles, and grapples effectively with sexual activity by clerics that preys on individuals through their spiritual or temporal power and identity.

This must also be a moment when we as bishops enmesh the penitence that must suffuse our work and our leadership, as well as the willingness to ponder deeply our own personal failures in confronting sexual victimization as the Lord would.

I know profoundly that as the priests in our parishes and the leaders of ministries and apostolates, you shoulder the major burden of consoling, guiding, listening and caring amidst the anger, the grief, the doubt and the disillusion that our people are experiencing at this moment, and that so many of you are also experiencing. For far too many of you, this will include supporting victims of clergy abuse in our local church, who have first claim upon us all in the Church at this moment.

I will be calling a meeting of the deans and the leadership of the Presbyteral Council this week, as well as a meeting of the pastoral Curia, to discuss how we must move forward in this new moment of sustained suffering and challenge. This will also be a central question at our priests' convocation next month. Let us always remember that in facing these harsh realities of sexual abuse, our guide is not earthly wisdom, but the Lord Jesus Christ who bids us to seek justice and show compassion for all those who are victimized. And let us remember also, that the Lord will never fail us, even when bishops or priests or the Church as a whole does.

It is in moments such as these that I am most grateful to you as you preach and live the Gospel of Christ in this diocese which we love so deeply.

Bishop McElroy