

There are times when words fail us - when they do not capture the depth of overwhelming situations we sometimes face in life. For the Church in the United States this is one of those times.

The Pennsylvania Grand Jury's report and the first-hand expressions of horror and devastating pain experienced by survivors once again wrench our hearts with the unimaginable that tragically is all too real for those who carry this pain. Once again we hear each excruciating word they share. We remain shamed by these egregious failures to protect children and those who are vulnerable and affirm our commitment that these failures will never be repeated.

While many perpetrators have been held accountable in one way or another for their crimes, we have yet to establish clear and transparent systems of accountability and consequence for Church leadership whose failures have allowed these crimes to occur. The Church must embrace spiritual conversion and demand legal transparency and pastoral accountability for all who carry out its mission.

This transformation is not easily achieved, but in all aspects it is imperative. The way we prepare priests, the way we exercise pastoral leadership and the way we cooperate with civil authorities; all these have to be consistently better than has been the case.

As I have stated previously, there are immediate actions that we can and must take. The clock is ticking for all of us in Church leadership, Catholics have lost patience with us and civil society has lost confidence in us.

But I am not without hope and do not succumb to despondent acceptance that our failures cannot be corrected. As the Church we have the responsibility to help people not to lose hope, that was Jesus' message to all those he ministered to, especially in times of great trial. There is too much good in the Church and in our faith to lose hope. Often it is survivors who courageously teach us we cannot lose hope.

Although "zero tolerance" of sexual abuse has been declared and pursued and programs of advocacy and protection of children have been adopted in dioceses throughout country, the memory, the record, the burden carried by survivors and every other fact of sexual abuse stay with the Church. We can never become complacent, this is a life-long ongoing work that demands the highest levels of our constant awareness and attention.

The crisis we face is the product of clerical sins and clerical failures. As a Church, the conversion, transparency and accountability we need is only possible with the significant involvement and leadership of lay men and women in our Church, individuals who can bring their competence, experience and skills to the task we face. We need the help of the laity to address this scourge on our people and Church. If the Church proceeds with deep recognition of these realities the future can hold the opportunity to earn back trust, confidence and support from the community of Catholics and our society. We must proceed quickly and with purpose; there is no time to waste."

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To survivors in the Archdiocese of Boston who struggle to process their pain and whose wounds are opened especially wide with the reports from Pennsylvania, please know that Vivian Soper, Director of the Archdiocese's Office of Pastoral Support and Child Protection and her colleagues stand ready to provide assistance, We encourage you to contact Vivian at 617-746-5985. To the survivors and their loved ones, we must again apologize and ask forgiveness. While much has been accomplished in the protection of children with the participation of the laity, there remains much more to be done. We are committed to the fulfillment of this responsibility as a continuing priority for the work of the Church.