

Action steps to accountability

You may have heard my statement read publicly at Masses in the Diocese on Sunday, Aug. 19, or read it as an insert in your parish bulletin. As a follow-up to my initial reaction, I present this reflection and a partial follow-up plan to the challenges to the present crises that are facing the church. I realize that changes need to be made in the governance of the church. I offer here some initial actions to which I commit myself.

1: I will increase and improve our pastoral care, concern and efforts to accompany victims of sexual abuse in their journey toward healing.

2: I will provide as many ways as possible for those who have been victimized to come forward without fear and to share their story of sexual abuse. We need to know as fully as possible the harm that was done, so that we can both offer care to victims and ensure no perpetrators remain in ministry.



Bishop David Ricken

3: I will listen to your concerns and suggestions. I, and others, will be reaching out through

a number of listening sessions throughout the diocese to listen to your concerns in the next few weeks, including anyone who has been impacted by recent reports and events. I will also read and take to heart letters and other correspondence sent to me.

4: I will again make priests' files accessible for complete review by the Independent Review Board, which is made up primarily of professional lay people and offers me direction on how to handle cases of abuse.

5: I will express my full support to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in their efforts to establish a national lay independent review board to provide a forum to handle complaints of misconduct or mismanagement by bishops. I commit to finding ways to provide increased accountability for bishops.

6: I will continue the practice of turning over all substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of minors to the proper civil authorities for investigation and continue a zero tolerance policy of any abuse reported.

7: I will direct that the diocesan mission campaign, "One by One," be paused for some time in order to focus my time and energy on addressing the issues and actions at hand at this time.

In this issue of *The Compass*, you will see a "report out" of some of what we are already doing that impacts or flows from these issues. I will continue to report to you in regard to other developments so that you are kept "in the loop" of communications locally.

Sexual abuse of minors is a horrible sin and crime. While we have been working vigorously for many years to be vigilant in these matters and to show loving pastoral care for victims, I am committed to making whatever changes are necessary to help us reform, learn and grow from this experience.

I also wish to speak to you as a pastor. This moment in time is an invitation to deepen our commitment to Christ.

As missionary disciples we are called to believe and proclaim Jesus Christ as the way, the truth and the life. As we face the storms of life that affect our personal lives, our church and the society in which we live, we must turn unabashedly to Jesus as our way, our truth and our life.

Jesus said, "I am the Way."

Jesus had the uncanny ability to name disgrace and sin in the

personal lives of the people he encountered, in the community of faith that he embraced and in the society in which he lived. He named and called out all that was evil, sinful, corrupt and immoral. Jesus, as our way, is calling us to name all that is evil and sinful in our time and in this moment. We must continue to stand with the victims of sexual abuse, who are calling us in their brokenness, to name the sin of abuse and the evil that has been rendered by some priests and bishops who have preyed upon (directly or indirectly) those who are entrusted to them.

Jesus said, "I am the Truth."

To name sin, Jesus spoke the truth, a truth that was not afraid to confront the religious leaders of his time, a truth that went to the heart of injustice and corruption. Jesus, our truth, is calling us to do whatever it takes to get to the bottom of the truth when it comes to the crimes of sexual abuse and cover up. Truth needs to come to the light. A truth that has been at times intentionally covered up or distorted to wrongfully protect priests and bishops instead of protecting the victims must be revealed. Jesus pricks our conscious with the reality that only the truth will set us free.

Jesus said, "I am the Life."

Jesus came into this world to give life and to give it abundantly. When sin is named and truth prevails, the abundant life of hope, mercy and grace is restored. Jesus not only had the uncanny ability to name disgrace, but even more so, to name grace. Jesus, as our life, is calling us to this moment of conversion, cleansing and purification in our church so that disgrace may be transformed into the grace of a new heart, new beginnings and, especially to those harmed by sexual abuse, abundant life.

As missionary disciples, we are called to believe and proclaim that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. We ask the assistance of the Holy Spirit to bring healing to victims and survivors, and to bring health to the entire church.

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