

Love one ANOTHER

BY: ARCHBISHOP JEROME E. LISTECKI



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Dear Friends in Christ,

I was ordained a bishop in January 2001. A year later, in January 2002, the Boston Globe reported the first of many articles about clergy sexual abuse of minors. Never in my entire priesthood could I have imagined such a thing and yet, as a bishop for 18 years and your archbishop for the last nine, clergy sexual abuse has never been “off my radar.” It continues to be (and rightfully so) at the forefront of our pastoral ministry in the Church and in this archdiocese.

Let’s face facts; abuse survivors were not always believed or treated justly by the archdiocese. Whether it was clericalism, a misguided intent to protect the institutional Church or the desire to avoid scandal, regard for priest offenders often trumped care for victims. For this, I apologize to abuse survivors and to the faithful of this archdiocese. You deserved better.

Formal outreach to abuse survivors began in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee in 1989, and the approach to working with abuse survivors began to change. Clinical Psychologist Dr. Liz Piasecki worked assisting abuse survivors, arranging for professional therapy and counseling. In 2002, that outreach was renewed, including the hiring of a victim assistance coordinator. In early 2004, the establishment of an independent mediation system provided financial compensation and other support.

But some offenders were not held accountable. In 2002, six priests with allegations of sexual abuse of a minor remained in active ministry. After the U.S. Bishops adopted the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People in 2002, which includes a “zero tolerance” provision, those six priests were removed from ministry.

In 2002, I think most Catholics were simply shocked to read the news reports of priests abusing minors. As I said, during my priesthood, never could I have imagined such a thing. But today, I think most Catholics react in anger, an anger which I share. News of cover-ups from years past, and information that some dioceses haven’t adhered to the demands of the Charter, has broken people’s trust in the Church and its leaders, namely bishops.

Just one bishop’s errant actions (or inaction) is enough to taint every bishop. However, we know it hasn’t been just one bishop. Report after report has shown a pattern of mismanagement of the responsibility placed upon each of us as members of the Church hierarchy.

My responsibility in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee is to rebuild trust, informing people what has been done here in our archdiocese, without becoming defensive to the legitimate questions and valid concerns people have raised.

Since the Charter was adopted, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee has been rigorous in its adherence to its every aspect, and has passed every outside, independent Charter audit. Regardless, now is the time to, once again, renew our commitments in response to clergy sexual abuse of minors.

So, I come before you as a member of the wounded Body of Christ with the following pledge of transparency, and with a commitment to action for myself and for the Church entrusted to my care.

I renew my commitment of care and concern for those who have been survivors of clergy sexual abuse of a minor. I apologize to those who have been hurt by these priest-perpetrators, and by the Church’s inability to adequately respond. I apologize for any of my own actions that have been a detriment to healing. I promise to meet personally

with any abuse survivor or family member who would like to meet with me. I will find a way for abuse survivors to tell their stories and be heard, and for those stories to be honored.

I pledge my commitment to zero tolerance. No priest with a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor can or will ever serve as a priest in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. The names of diocesan priest offenders will continue to be posted on the archdiocesan website along with information about where they worked and files related to their abuse.

Any allegation of sexual abuse involving a minor will be immediately reported to civil or police authorities. All bishops, priests and lay parish/school staffs will follow the mandatory reporting laws of the State of Wisconsin.

I will expand the involvement of lay men and women on our Community Advisory Board and Priest Placement Board, and new members are in the process of being added to both groups. I will establish a process for reporting misconduct or mismanagement by bishops. I will support a national system implemented by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops to do the same.

I will direct my staff to cooperate with law enforcement, and meet with the Milwaukee County District Attorney to verify that clergy personnel files have been reviewed to ensure nothing has been missed in regard to criminal conduct on the part of any member of the clergy, including bishops.

As a sign of our repentance, and because of the pain caused to abuse survivors and their families with regard to the handling of sexual abuse allegations, I will change the name of the Archbishop Cousins Catholic Center, and ask the parish of the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist to remove the name of Archbishop Rembert Weakland from its parish pastoral center. This is similar to decisions made by other bishops throughout the United States. I will remind parishes of our policy that buildings, centers, gym floors, cafeterias, etc., are not to be named after a priest or bishop, regardless of the esteem in which they may be held by the parish.

I will respectfully listen to the People of God in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, and hear their suggestions, concerns and reservations.

It will take time to restore the trust that has been lost, and our response may not always be perfect. I promise you my tireless efforts. Each step we take is progress, and if rooted in love, will bear great fruit. With these actions, we renew our commitment and call to LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

Amazing Grace,

Most Reverend Jerome E. ListECKI



ARCHDIOCESE
of MILWAUKEE