

Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Office of the archbishop

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Dear Friends in Christ,

In the Church, as we move into September, we see an increase in activity at our parishes and schools. As your Archbishop, September is another opportunity for me to keep in communication with you through this Catholic Stewardship Appeal mailing.

These have been challenging times for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee as we continue to move through the Chapter 11 process. Soon, a Plan of Reorganization will be submitted to the court for approval. The Plan will outline how the Church will settle the claims of abuse survivors and others involved in the bankruptcy proceeding so we can move forward with the ministry and good works of the Church in southeastern Wisconsin. I have tried to answer some questions about the bankruptcy on the back of this page.

The bankruptcy proceeding and the sexual abuse scandal do not define who we are as a Church. Our mission comes from Jesus himself, who called us to be disciples and to make disciples of all nations. That is who we are as Catholics and why we continue to serve one another through worship, word and service. Your support sustains the good work of the Church.

As Pope Francis said at the close of the recent World Youth Day in Brazil, "Sharing the experience of faith, bearing witness to the faith, proclaiming the Gospel: this is a command that the Lord entrusts to the whole Church, and that includes you..."

To continue our growth and renewal, I have called for a diocesan Synod, which is an assembly of the faithful who deliberate the pastoral needs and priorities of the archdiocese. I want this process to be an opportunity to receive input from lay and ordained persons from throughout the entire archdiocese.

This fall, parishes will hold sessions open to everyone and these sessions will be followed by district gatherings early next year. The actual Synod will take place on Pentecost weekend June 7-8, 2014. The outcome of the Synod will direct the work of the Church for the next 10-15 years.

I pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance as we come together to renew the work of the Church in southeastern Wisconsin. I encourage you to take part in this historic process.

Being the Archbishop of Milwaukee is a privilege and a responsibility I take very seriously. I pray each day for the people of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and I ask for your prayers for me.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Jerome E. Listecki

Most Reverend Jerome E. Listecki
Archbishop of Milwaukee

Here are some questions and answers regarding clergy sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and the current Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceeding. Additional Q&A's and other information are available online at www.archmil.org.

Why did the Archdiocese of Milwaukee file for Chapter 11?

In 2010, the archdiocese had several lawsuits pending against it because of claims of sexual abuse of minors by diocesan priests from years prior. I was very forthcoming regarding the archdiocese's financial ability to settle those claims. When those claims could not be settled through mediation, the archdiocese filed for bankruptcy believing that would be the best opportunity to make sure that individuals with eligible claims against diocesan priests were compensated.

Why is the Chapter 11 process taking so long?

The court must determine a number of complicated issues, including which claims are eligible for compensation. But in addition to that, attorneys for the creditors' committee have fought the archdiocese at every step by litigating everything to the point that the few assets the archdiocese did have available have been spent on attorneys.

What was the result of the litigation?

Even though the archdiocese was open and honest about its finances from the beginning, the creditors' attorneys took a tact of "over-lawyering" by hiring forensic accountants to scour the archdiocese's books from the past 20 years, as well as filing motions to try and take funds belonging to the individual parishes and the cemetery perpetual care trust. Because the archdiocese has to pay for the creditors' attorneys, this "over-lawyering" cost the archdiocese nearly three years and \$8 million dollars only to prove what the archdiocese said all along was true, namely that we don't have the money the lawyers were looking for and I, in good conscience, cannot take money from funds that do not belong to the archdiocese in order to meet their demands.

What about parish funds?

The judge in the Chapter 11 has ruled that parishes and their assets are separate from the archdiocese and they are not included in the Chapter 11 proceeding. The same is true for the Parish Deposit Fund, which many parishes and schools used as an investment vehicle.

What about the Cemetery Perpetual Care Trust?

The money in the Cemetery Perpetual Care Trust can only be used for perpetual care of the archdiocese's eight Catholic cemeteries. It was set aside for that purpose; it was never used for other purposes. On the recommendation of the archdiocesan Finance Council, these monies, already held in trust in a separate account, were placed in a formal trust to honor the promise Catholic cemeteries make to the deceased and their families – that the Catholic Church will preserve and maintain cemeteries as sacred places forever. The District Court judge recently determined this money could not be used for any other purpose but perpetual care, but that decision has not stopped the attorneys from trying to get at that money, including questioning the judge's objectivity just because he has relatives buried in a Catholic cemetery.

What do abuse survivors want?

Over and over, abuse survivors tell me they want to make sure that what happened to them can never happen to anyone else. They also want to know how something like this happened in the first place. In response to abuse survivors and the community, the archdiocese posts the names of all diocesan priest offenders on its website. It has also posted the documents related to sexual abuse by diocesan priests requested by the attorneys for abuse survivors. Most importantly, policies, practices and programs have been put in place to make sure, to the best of our ability, that children and young people are safe in Catholic parishes and schools.

How can you be sure children are safe?

Our safe environment programs have trained more than 50,000 priests, deacons, parish and school staff and volunteers, and have provided age-appropriate awareness training to our students in Catholic schools and religious education programs. There is never a guarantee; all you have to do is read the morning paper to see allegations of abuse in various institutions in our society, but the Church has taken steps to educate people and increase awareness of the warning signs of sexual abuse.

Is this simply about money?

It might be for the tort attorneys, but abuse survivors tell us this is not about the money and I believe them. We know that no amount of money can ever be enough to restore what was taken from those who suffered abuse. Can we ever provide enough money to satisfy the attorneys? Probably not, but what remains to be determined is how we can best use the limited resources we have left to help abuse survivors find resolution and healing to move forward.

Will any of this help abuse survivors?

For decades, the archdiocese has provided therapy and counseling for abuse survivors who needed and desired that assistance, and we will continue to do so regardless of what happens in the Chapter 11 proceeding.

When will this be over?

The archdiocese will file a Plan of Reorganization that will enable us to emerge from bankruptcy once it is confirmed by the court. The plan will include provisions for abuse survivors, as well as other creditors. Our Plan of Reorganization will renew our pledge and commitment to abuse survivors and also renew our spiritual commitment to the work of the Church in southeastern Wisconsin. By the grace of God, it will allow the archdiocese to get back to what it is supposed to be doing: continuing the Church's ministry in southeastern Wisconsin.

Where can I find the latest information?

For more information on the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, the ministries and outreach of the Church, and the bankruptcy, please visit www.archmil.org.