



October 4, 2018

Archbishop Jerome ListECKI discusses Clergy Sexual Abuse in a letter to the Faithful

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Once again the Catholic Church faces the evil, sinful scourge of criminal sexual abuse of minors by clergy, harkening back to the watershed year of 2002. Having seen and heard the news stories once again, it reopens those wounds we thought were starting to heal, especially for those who have been violated.

As your Shepherd, you should know three things about me. First and foremost, you should know I am a believer. I believe in the testimony that Jesus Christ gives us and in the love that He offers us. I believe in the teachings of the Church and I know that I will be held accountable before God for my actions.

Second, I love the Catholic Church. Not the brick and mortar that makes up the buildings, but rather our brothers and sisters who through their baptism come together to profess their faith, who form the Body of Christ, and live as Christ's presence in the world.

Third, I know and I am confident that God will not abandon us, especially in our time of need. It is His promise to us that He will be with us until the end of time.

So when things like the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report become public or we hear reports about former Cardinal McCarrick's reprehensible behavior, it breaks our trust. There is no doubt that the handling of allegations by bishops and others, and the attempted cover-up by bishops and the institutional Church, has led to the destruction of innocent lives.

Sin is real. Is there any doubt why the devil attacks the Church? There is no justification for allowing evil into the Church. There is no justification for thinking that if only we could cover things up, it would be better the next day.

The problem is that once sin is rooted into the lives of a community, it is destructive for everyone involved. We have seen the destruction happen. We have seen how trying to protect the institution took precedence over protecting our young people; how a clerical culture protected offenders and exposed children and youth to harm.

Because I am a believer, because I love the Church, and because I know Christ will not abandon us, I accept the collective responsibility of the Church that committed sin; of the individuals who took advantage of innocent individuals; and for Church leaders who hid that sin for decades. For those actions, I apologize to anyone who was abused by someone in the Church, especially those who were children.

Like you, I am angry, disgusted, ashamed, embarrassed and betrayed. One never expects to find sin anywhere, especially in the Church. The brave victims who have come forward — and it has been my privilege to hear some of their painful stories — have already helped us to be a different Church. Imagine the courage that it takes to come forward and expose the predators in order that others might be spared these atrocities.

The silence of Church leaders in the face of sin and crime keeps the Church in darkness and does harm. It is only the light that can dispel the darkness of evil. We must now shine a light on this darkness within the Church.

Keeping children safe from sexual abuse is a priority of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and we have taken important steps to make sure our priorities are in order to implement initiatives designed to guard against anything like this in the future. Since this news reemerged this past summer, I have been asked continuously, "What is the Church going to do?" Here are some of the actions implemented by the archdiocese to keep children safe:

- No priest with a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor serves in public ministry in any way in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Religious order priests are subject to the same standards.

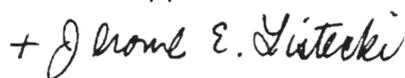
- All allegations of sexual abuse of a minor are reported to civil authorities, and all archdiocesan and parish personnel are bound by the mandatory reporting laws of the State of Wisconsin.
- The Diocesan Review Board, made up of mostly lay men and women and led by former Lt. Gov. Margaret Farrow, diligently oversees the investigation of any accusation of clergy sexual abuse of a minor. Professional, independent investigators are used to investigate any allegations.
- Actions have been taken under Canon Law to permanently remove priest-perpetrators from ministry.
- The names of all diocesan priests or deacons with a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor were publicly released in July 2004. That listing has been maintained and updated, including information from the offender's file that details the abuse history and timeline.
- In 1994, retired Judge Leander Foley was asked to review the files of all known clergy offenders for the same purpose, to determine if any cases could still be prosecuted. In 2002, civil authorities reviewed archdiocesan files of all priests accused of sexual abuse of minors to determine if any cases fell within the criminal statute of limitations.
- In 2004, a forensic audit of all priest files was conducted by an independent, investigative group of former law enforcement officers to make sure no bad behavior had gone undetected or was "masked" by the coded language or euphemisms noted in the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report.
- State and national criminal background checks are required for all adults, including priests and bishops, staff and volunteers, and these checks are repeated every five years.
- All Church personnel, including priests and bishops, must read and sign the Code of Ethical Standards for Church Personnel, which clearly outlines expected and acceptable behavior.
- Sexual abuse prevention training and safe environment education is required for all archdiocesan and parish employees, as well as volunteers who have regular contact with minors. More than 45,000 adults and 100,000 children have participated.
- A "whistleblower" policy is in place to protect anyone who makes a sexual abuse report from suffering consequences related to making the report.
- A Social Networking Policy has been established, outlining practices and guidelines to be followed in order to maintain healthy boundaries and safe environments within a virtual world.
- A Community Advisory Board is in place, composed of representatives from various social services agencies and experts in the area of sexual abuse, and meets regularly with the archbishop to provide guidance in the Church's response to victims of sexual abuse and implementation of policies.
- The archdiocese supported State legislation expanding responsibilities for mandatory reporters of child sexual abuse, as well as extending future criminal and civil statute of limitations for victims/survivors to seek action in both criminal and civil courts.

Much has been accomplished and we will continue our vigilance to our commitments. I plan to meet with a group of lay Catholics in the archdiocese to listen to their concerns about what else should be done regarding accountability for bishops, as well as to their concerns that action is being taken. I want to take their input with me to the November meeting of U.S. Catholic Bishops.

Whatever is yet to come in terms of future disclosures about clergy abuse, we will face it together as a Church, and with confidence, call upon our Lord to assist us in our reform.

"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13: 34-35)

With assurance of prayers, I am,
Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Jerome E. Listecki
Archbishop of Milwaukee

P.S. For more facts, information and resources about clergy sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, please visit archmil.org