



Office of the Bishop
Diocese of Toledo

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20 August 2018

Letter to the Faithful regarding sexual abuse in the Church

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“Who is weak that I am not affected by it, who is scandalized that I am not aflame with indignation?” (2 Cor 11:29). These words of Saint Paul to the Corinthians flood my heart and soul these days following the recent revelations of the depraved moral failures of some priests and bishops whose actions or inactions have so wounded the vulnerable and betrayed the trust of the faithful. As a bishop and shepherd of the Church, I cannot express strongly enough the anger and sorrow I feel for the physical, spiritual and emotional pain and suffering endured by survivors and their loved ones. You have my deepest sorrow and fervent prayers for healing. Nor can I express strongly enough how committed we are to providing support and assistance to those who have been hurt, and to renewing our efforts to prevent such abuse.

When I learned of the sexual abuse and immorality of former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, and that of certain priests and bishops over a period of more than 70 years recounted in the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report, I was angry, shamed and sick at heart. The abuse of a minor on the part of anyone, especially a cleric, is a grave moral evil and cannot be tolerated. During these days I have received questions and comments expressing the justified anger, hurt and betrayal many feel regarding the accounts of clerics who turned away from their sacred vows and moral responsibility to protect children and the vulnerable by abusing them or allowing that abuse to continue. You are rightly scandalized and aflame with indignation.

We cannot, must not and will not tolerate any abuse within the Catholic Church. We will continue to be diligent in responding to accusations in a timely and just manner, no matter who is accused or when the abuse took place. I want to reassure you of what we have done and continue to do here in our diocese to accomplish this:

With reforms put in place since 2002, the Church in the United States and our diocese have made the prevention of abuse part of our ecclesial culture. Since that time, instances of reported abuse of minors have radically declined. That year, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted a Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/charter.cfm>), pledging to do all in their power to protect children and youth and devote the resources necessary to accomplish that goal. This Charter was revised and updated in 2005, 2011 and again in 2018. This Charter commits me, and my fellow bishops, to respond promptly and compassionately to victims, to report the abuse of any minor to law enforcement, to treat swiftly and justly allegations of abuse, to offer care to victims, to discipline offenders, and to take ongoing action to prevent abuse.

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We are committed to ongoing safe environment training for all who serve our youth, to conducting criminal background checks and to taking every allegation seriously. In May 2018, the Diocese of Toledo updated, revised and strengthened our own *Policy for the Protection of Minors and Young People with Accompanying Standards of Behavior and Boundaries and Guidelines for the Prevention of Abuse of Vulnerable Adults* (https://toledodiocese.org/page/protecting-youth-victim-assistance#_policy_for_the_protection_of_minors) in order to make clear what is required for all those in our diocese who serve children, youth and vulnerable adults, and to guarantee as best we can a safe environment for all. Today and going forward we must prove, by our actions, that we are committed to the safety of children and the vulnerable.

At the same time, as important and necessary as such policies are, it is even more important that to follow them faithfully and achieve their intent, we must acknowledge and address in earnest the root and cause of such abuse: grave moral failures which are the direct result of heinous sin and the lack of accountability. Unless our policies have the underpinning of lives of moral integrity lived by those whose responsibility it is to see they are enforced, they remain ineffective.

Together with all of you who are so faithful to the Church, I lament that when many thought perhaps the Church was on the road to recovery from such a scourge inflicted by her own, it feels now as if the scab has been torn off again, the pain of that wound even more raw than before. Sexual abuse in the Church is a deep wound, a wound which is the result of a cancer which clearly has not yet been excised. This cancer in the Church requires a response which goes beyond the practical or the human, it requires a response which is deeply spiritual and supernatural. Because this cancer is evil and “this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting” (Mk 9:29).

As a Church, our mission must be the mission to which Christ Jesus himself calls us all: to conversion, to forgiveness, to healing and to holiness. This call starts first with myself in fidelity to Christ and to you, His flock, as your bishop. It continues with all my brother bishops, calling us to the moral integrity, paternal responsibility and accountability our sacred office requires. This call includes all our priests and seminarians, together with whom I am called to live a life of virtue, purity and chaste celibacy, in order to restore the integrity of the priesthood.

I turn once again to Saint Paul, who writes: “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom 5:20). In the face of this moment of trial and purification, I encourage all those who have suffered abuse to report it first to law enforcement and then to our Office for Child and Youth Protection and Victim Assistance at 419-214-4880. I encourage all those who serve our children and vulnerable individuals to redouble their commitment to the safety of those entrusted to our care through fidelity to established policy and to moral integrity of life.

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Convinced that where sin has increased grace will abound all the more, I encourage all those whose faith may be shaken not to lose heart nor to walk away from your home in the Catholic Church because of the sins of some. I encourage all those whose faith in the leadership of the Church has been eroded to pray that we bishops may forthrightly respond together to this dark moment with the moral integrity of life and the resolve and accountability which our very vocation demands.

When I first came among you, I asked that you join me each week in offering prayer, fasting and almsgiving for the intention to form holy disciples, holy families and foster holy vocations for a more holy Diocese of Toledo. I believe now more than ever in the necessity of this common mission and renew that request.

Because the cancer of abuse in the Church requires a deep spiritual and supernatural remedy, I encourage all our diocesan family together with me now to add to our mission this new effort: to do penance and fast for the healing of victims, for the purifying and reform of those called to shepherd in the name of the Lord, and for the healing and purification of the whole Church, which can only come about by the conversion of heart, mind and soul of all her members.

Such a healing and purification depends on both our individual and communal response to the Lord's admonition at the beginning of His public ministry: "This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15).

Trusting in Divine Providence and confident that as we move forward, grace will abound all the more, I will be inviting you to periodic spiritual initiatives so that we might intentionally combat the evil which has wounded so many victims, indeed so wounded Christ and His Church. The first such initiative will be held on Friday, 14 September 2018, The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, when I am asking our parishes to offer extended Adoration of the Holy Eucharist after morning Mass and throughout the day, allowing time for all who can to visit the Blessed Sacrament, to fast and pray that day for the intentions of the healing of victims, for the reform of the hierarchy and the clergy and for the purification and holiness of the Church.

With the pledge of my prayers for you and your intentions, and depending on your good prayers, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daniel E. Thomas".

Most Reverend Daniel E. Thomas
Bishop of Toledo