



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

*A letter from Bishop Nickless to all the faithful of the Diocese of Sioux City
in response to the recent reports of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church*

21 August 2018

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

In response to the Pennsylvania grand jury report made public last week, and the accusations against former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, please know that I feel as you do. I am disgusted by the horrible, soul-searing details of these crimes. I am filled with anger against those Church leaders who allowed such men to persist in their actions, and who failed gravely in their responsibility by trying to hide these truths from everyone. I am overwhelmed by sadness at the damage done to innocent lives.

And yet, I am grateful – grateful for the courage of the victims who have come forward, and grateful for the harsh light of truth, which can hopefully force needed change. We must not tolerate anything less. The release of the report serves as a kind of examination of conscience. May we all, but especially we bishops, have the grace and humility to be truly contrite, and to resolve firmly to amend our ways and cling to our Savior, Jesus Christ, our only sure hope.

To those who have been harmed by sexual abuse in the Church, I again express my extreme, personal sorrow. You are beloved children of God, and we have wronged you. If you have not yet done so, please come forward to share your story, whether to the Church or to civil officials. In this way, you can help to hold us accountable for what has happened. I promise again to do whatever is in my power to assist you. I am always willing to meet with you, to listen to you, to beg your forgiveness, and to help in any way I can. I also renew my promise to cooperate fully with law enforcement.

I also affirm the great majority of clergy, consecrated persons, and faithful throughout the Church, and in particular the priests who serve our Diocese, who have never committed nor tolerated by their silence such sins and crimes. You now bear the scorn of the world, not through your own fault, but because of the transgressions of a few. In this, too, we follow Christ, who goes before us so that we can know the way. Please continue to hold firm in your faith! There is nowhere else to go.

Although it may be of scant comfort, I urge you to recognize that the standards and procedures put in place by the Catholic Church since the sexual abuse scandal first broke in 2001 have been remarkably effective, as far as they go. No policy can be perfect, of course, but young people and vulnerable adults are as safe as we can humanly make them in our schools and parishes. The Dallas Charter, however, as this current iteration of the scandal shows, still fails to hold bishops adequately accountable, either for abuse or for covering up abuse. It needs to be changed.

As I said in my Catholic Globe letter of August 9th, good policies and good governance are necessary, but not sufficient, in responding to evil. If we hope to cleanse the Church, we must do more than make policies. We must respond more fully and radically to God's call to holiness, and to the way of the Cross. Though we live *in* the world, we must commit again not to be *of* the world.

Again, I ask all of us to examine our consciences. When we see sin, we need to name it, specifically, as St. Paul does: homosexual activity, adultery, fornication and lewd conduct of any kind. Do not be afraid to speak the truth in love and to ask for forgiveness.

I ask you to join me in three specific actions, as much as you can, in the coming months to respond to this situation.

- (1) **PRAY:** Jesus said, “Knock, and it will be opened to you; seek, and you will find.” We need Jesus to show us the path forward, and not imagine we can find it ourselves. We need therefore to commit to increase our daily prayer. I ask you, as much as you can, to pray daily, especially either the Rosary or the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, for the holiness and fidelity of me and my fellow Bishops and priests, and for healing in the midst of pain, especially for the victims of clergy sexual abuse.
- (2) **HOPE:** St. Peter enjoins us, “Be always ready to give reason for the hope that is within you.” Remember that God has promised always to be with us, and that the gates of Hell will not prevail against the power of Christ in the Church. Do not despair; be people of hope, even in these dark times. The spiritual treasures of the Church do not depend on us or our worthiness, but only on God's perfect faithfulness. Cling firmly to God, and to our Catholic faith. Reflect often on the words of Pope St. John Paul II: “Be not afraid.” God can and does bring good out of evil.
- (3) **FAST:** Jesus said, “Some demons can only be driven out with prayer and fasting.” Specifically, as an act of reparation for the sins of priests and bishops, I ask that each of us in the Diocese commit to pray and fast on the First Friday of September (the 7th). Please fast, at least on this day, from food, or from alcohol, or from social media, or from whatever you need to so that you can grow in holiness. Moreover, if you are able, pray the novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and do some sort of fasting on the nine consecutive First Fridays (September – May).

May Christ extend again His mercy and grace to us all. May He give us the grace to reject every temptation and evil that afflicts us. May He give us the grace of true contrition for all the times we have sinned. May He sustain among us His priestly ministry of the forgiveness of sins. May He make all of us into His blessed instruments for peace in the Church, and in the world. May each one of you know the love of Christ in your heart, now and always.

Your chastened brother in Christ,

Most Reverend R. Walker Nickless
Bishop of Sioux City

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