



Diocese of Richmond

Office of the Bishop

**“From Tragedy to Hope”
Pastoral Letter to the Clergy and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Richmond
Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout,
Bishop of the Diocese of Richmond,
September 14, 2018
Solemnity of the Holy Cross**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In Scripture, we find a number of pastoral letters written by the Apostle Paul which reflect on the exercise of leadership by those charged with the care of young Christian communities he had established. At the time he wrote the Second Letter to Timothy, Paul was in prison and Timothy, a young and inexperienced leader, needed encouragement for the challenging work of preaching the Gospel. The community was struggling to know in the many voices claiming to be preaching the truth, what was, indeed, truth and what was false.

We are a community struggling to make sense of truths and untruths. We are angry and discouraged. It is a time of great anguish for those who have been victimized by our clergy and for those who trusted that the leadership of the Church had properly addressed the issues related to the sexual abuse crisis.

Recent revelations showed the brutal ugliness and perverse nature of crimes by some clergy. People within the Church and outside of it are responding with revulsion and disgust. Church leadership is implicated in the abuse of power, have been complicit in abusive actions, and failed to act, thus allowing innocents to have been severely wounded in mind, body and spirit.

We are a community in which trust has been broken and we hear calls for resignation of Church leaders and implementation of transparent and effective mechanisms of accountability. I cannot help but to be affected by this as well, not only as a bishop, but also as someone who worked with those who are prominently implicated in the scandal.

In this letter, drawing upon the Apostle Paul’s reflection on the exercise of leadership in his own circumstances, I, as the shepherd of the Church of Richmond, am also called to “proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2).

Failed Church Leadership

I hear and understand your anger and disgust in what we are seeing and hearing as the Church we love is again being publicly shamed because of what its leaders did and failed to do. I share your anger as I, too, am ashamed by the actions and inactions of Church leaders and I am embarrassed by these revelations.

As one member of a body called to lead the Church, I deeply regret all and any injury that has occurred. I also regret that you must bear the burden of the damage done by so many who were called to a higher standard of activity and behavior.

I am vividly aware of my own limitations to address the open wound within our Church. But, I will do all within my power to work with other bishops to learn the full truth and to share the full extent of the problem with the Church.

A Light to the World

Many people have asked if our Church is capable of renewal and reform. This is a question the people of God have asked many times in our 2,000-year history and the answer has always been yes — by God’s grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In “Lumen Gentium,” the Second Vatican Council’s document on the Church, we read that “the Church, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal. The Church, ‘like a stranger in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God’ (St. Augustine), announcing the cross and death of the Lord until He comes.’ By the power of the risen Lord it is given strength that it might, in patience and in love, overcome its sorrows and its challenges, both within itself and from without, and that it might reveal to the world, faithfully though darkly, the mystery of its Lord until, in the end, it will be manifested in full light” (Lumen Gentium, 8).

What are the building blocks of renewal in this local church?

Pope Francis has asked the whole Church to pray and fast. The first action of any Catholic or Christian should be prayer, turning to God in petition and supplication, intercession and reparation, recognizing our own faults and how they may contribute to an environment of sin. Prayer must accompany us through every stage of our actions or responses to the present crisis facing the Church.

As a concrete sign of my commitment I have directed that the following steps to be taken:

- That the celebration of the Mass of Atonement be our first diocesan response to this call to prayer and fasting. It will not be our only response; there will be regional Masses throughout the diocese. I invite all the clergy, religious, and laity of the Diocese of Richmond to join in occasions of prayer and fasting on Fridays throughout the remainder

of this year. We are reminded of the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

- Our diocese is committed to making public the names of those priests from our diocese who have received credible and substantiated allegations of abuse. I believe this to be an important step in helping survivors with their healing.
- There will be a full, extensive audit of clergy files by an independent entity, with oversight by the Diocesan Review Board, which will hold us accountable. It also gives me, as your newly installed bishop, the assurance that no one who has been credibly accused remains in active ministry.
- Funds are set aside as an abuse victims’ assistance fund for counseling aid to those who have experienced abuse from clergy. This fund will be managed by the Diocesan Review Board.

We can also look toward a continuation of what the Church has done in light of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the findings of the John Jay Study. For the past 14 years and as a permanent part of the way in which we carry out our ministry, the diocese will continue to ensure the protection of children and our most vulnerable brothers and sisters by renewing our diocesan commitment to the following structures of formation and accountability already in place in the diocese:

- We will continue to demonstrate leadership in the protection of children through the VIRTUS Training Program. This program is fundamental to our shared understanding of child protection. Every adult, clergy member, religious and lay person who is employed or volunteers with youth or vulnerable adults must complete VIRTUS Training and have background checks done by civil authorities. Anyone who has not completed these requirements will not be permitted to serve in the Diocese. The Diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator, together with the Diocesan Review Board, coordinates the mandatory VIRTUS Training and background screening of all clergy, religious, lay employees, and volunteers, and certifies their suitability for ministry.
- Continuing implementation of the existing policies, code of conduct, and procedures for evaluating, reporting and responding to all accusations of abuse.
- Reinforcing ongoing, mandatory training for priests and deacons related to the protection of minors and best practices for working with children.
- Strengthening the Diocesan Safe Environment Office that coordinates the training and certification of adults who work with children, and that receives and investigates every allegation of misconduct that is reported.
- Continued recourse to the Diocesan Review Board, a board of lay women and men who meet quarterly to review reported accusations of abuse received by the Office of Child Protection, and who make recommendations on strengthening our child protection policies.

Toward Greater Reform

The present crisis calls for reform and growth in particular areas. First and foremost, bishops, priests and deacons are rightly held to a higher standard because of their public teaching role and must be witnesses as well as teachers, examples of holiness as well as fellow pilgrims and sinners on a journey of faith.

While the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People did not address how the Church is to investigate and discipline bishops who fail in their capacity as leaders, there is a provision in canon law (Canon 1717) for such an investigation when it is warranted. I support the development of policies and practices for adjudicating complaints against bishops, and I support and promise my full cooperation with any independent, lay-managed, authoritative investigation into the scandal of Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick.

A Commitment to Greater Co-responsibility

One of the most beautiful images we use to describe the Church is the “Body of Christ.” It speaks to both the union we experience in receiving Our Lord in holy Communion and the reality that Jesus is the head of the body that is the Church.

At the Second Vatican Council, when considering the role of the laity in the life of the Church, the Council Fathers wrote: “The laity are gathered together in the People of God and make up the Body of Christ under one head. Whoever they are they are called upon, as living members, to expend all their energy for the growth of the Church and its continuous sanctification, since this very energy is a gift of the Creator and a blessing of the Redeemer” (Lumen Gentium, 33).

This points to a particular responsibility — what Pope Benedict XVI called a co-responsibility for the laity with our priests and me, as bishop, for the integrity for the mission of the Church. In an address to a pastoral convention of the Diocese of Rome in 2009, Pope Benedict reflected: “This demands a change in mindset, particularly concerning lay people. They must no longer be viewed as ‘collaborators’ of the clergy but truly recognized as ‘co-responsible,’ for the Church’s being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity” (“Church Membership and Pastoral Co-Responsibility,” May 26, 2009).

In a recent homily, I reflected on my experience of how the Little Sisters of the Poor shepherd the elderly in the latter years of life, through death, into eternity. I witnessed this shepherding care extended to Cardinal James A. Hickey at his death in 2004. I said in that homily that “sometimes shepherds need shepherds.” The laity and those in consecrated life are being called upon to do just that.

I join other bishops who are calling for a greater involvement of the laity, not only in the important work of parish and diocesan pastoral councils but particularly in creating structures necessary to protect our most vulnerable members and for their ongoing care so as to be able to experience the healing love of Jesus in the Church. I pledge to work with bishops and all Church leaders responsible for the formation of priests and laity for ministry in establishing proper

safeguards for the protection of children and all vulnerable populations, and the investigation of any allegation of misconduct and proper exercise of ecclesial and civil law.

Making Sense of the Facts

As the authors of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report say, much of what was uncovered in Pennsylvania is similar to what was reported in the John Jay Study (<https://tinyurl.com/7kk7c3d>) that followed the abuse scandal in the Archdiocese of Boston and in many other dioceses. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops hired the John Jay College of Criminal Justice to conduct a study of “the nature and scope of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests and deacons.”

We learned from the study that “sexual victimization of children is a serious and pervasive issue in society. It is present in families, and it is not uncommon in institutions where adults form mentoring and nurturing relationships with adolescents, including schools, and religious, sports, and social organizations” (p.5).

The U.S. bishops’ study looked at allegations against priests and deacons from 1950-2002. It found 4.3 percent of diocesan priests and 2.5 percent of religious priests were accused of sexual misconduct with minors. The majority of priests with allegations were ordained between 1950 and 1979.

Since 1979, the Church has made a number of changes in the formation of clergy and learned much about the diagnosis and treatment of people with inclinations toward pedophilia. Furthermore, with the acceptance of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People in 2002, and after the 2004 recommendations from the National Review Board in the “Causes and Context” report on the crisis in the Catholic Church in the United States, most bishops changed the seminary and diocesan procedures for investigating and reporting allegations of sexual misconduct. Both of these changes point to proven measures of success in protecting vulnerable people.

These statistics can serve as a source of hope that structures do exist to protect our children and vulnerable populations, but the Church must continue to do everything in its power to have zero allegations of sexual misconduct among its bishops, priests and deacons.

However, the current crisis reveals a number of weaknesses within the structure of the Church and its institutions. As publicized in the grand jury report and in the media, some bishops, priests and deacons failed to live chastely and faithfully. This is a complex problem that will require multifaceted solutions.

Because the John Jay report so adequately addresses the root causes of the poor manner in which accusations were investigated and addressed regarding clergy with pedophilia inclinations, I want to focus on additional causes that have come to light in the Grand Jury report and in the accusations against Archbishop McCarrick and other Church leaders.

Clericalism and a Lack of Transparency

As Pope Francis indicated in his letter to all the People of God, there is clericalism in the Church. Clericalism is not a new challenge for the Church. Any time a member of the clergy insists on or people give a member of the clergy preferential treatment, i.e., an extreme deference, clericalism will easily take root. In that kind of environment, a bishop, priest or deacon may feel he does not need to be accountable for his actions to the people he serves. At times, clericalism has been manifested in a desire to protect the reputation of the institution at the expense of wounding vulnerable people.

This sin of clericalism is committed when there is an abuse of power and a lack of effective governance. Earlier this summer, Pope Francis wrote that clericalism “not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people. Clericalism, whether fostered by clergy themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say ‘no’ to abuse is to say an emphatic ‘no’ to all forms of clericalism” (Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God, August 20, 2018).

Poor Exercise of Leadership

Good governance is critical to the exercise of leadership. We are learning that Church leaders have failed to govern effectively. At the local level we know how critical leadership is to the success of a Catholic school or other institutions. Leadership is best practiced in a transparent way which includes accountability. All clergy must accept the accountability that comes from being called to their vocation and the care of God’s children.

As a child of God, like you, I am accountable to God from whom everything good in life is a gift. Like you, as a Christian, I am accountable to Christ the Judge of heaven and earth and to the Church, the Body of Christ. As a bishop, I am accountable to you, the faithful of the Diocese of Richmond, and to my superiors, including Pope Francis and his successors.

Because we are a Church which is in the world, but not of the world, we are called to bring the Gospel to bear on the questions of the day, and to work with civil authorities and organizations for the common good of the community; we have a responsibility to truthful partnerships. The Pennsylvania Grand Jury report indicates Church leaders failed to report to civil authorities when that is what the law called for, and that we do not adequately address the conflicts between laws governing the Church (canon law) and laws concerning civil states (civil law).

Human Sexuality and the Practice of Chastity

In the first pages of Scripture we learn man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us the spiritual and corporeal nature of the human person: “The biblical account expresses this reality in a symbolic language when it affirms that ‘then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being’” (Genesis 2:7, cf CCC, #362).

Made in the image and likeness of God, we are made for communion with God, our creator and father. In this desire for love and communion is the gift of human sexuality. Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of one's body and soul.

In an increasingly secularized age in which individual choice and individually formed consciences seem to determine one's gender, sexual preference and sexual expression, the truth of the Church's moral teaching is thought to be increasingly out of touch and outdated.

Just as chaste living is more difficult in a permissive culture, the life-long practice of celibacy is all the more challenging. It is of no help to have seminary and institutional environments in which the healthy practice of celibacy is not taught and practiced.

Whether one has heterosexual or homosexual orientation, sexual chastity is a part of every vocation, be it ordained, married, single or religious. "According to Church doctrine, homosexuality is an intrinsic disorder and homosexual acts are gravely immoral. At the same time, the Church has long been known for its position that a homosexual person is not to blame for their orientation. So, too, the National Review Board draws a distinction between homosexual individuals and homosexual acts. We do not seek to place blame for the sexual abuse crisis on the presence of homosexual individuals in the priesthood as there are many chaste and holy homosexual priests who are faithful to their vows of celibacy. However, we must call attention to the homosexual behavior that characterized the vast majority of the cases of abuse observed in recent decades." (A Report on the Crisis in the Catholic Church in the United States: The National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People, 2004).

The Church does not expect perfection, and as God's mercy is abundant in and through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, every effort must be made to help men and women who have made a vow of celibacy to be emotionally and physically healthy in their ability to form intimate and chaste friendships.

The Church must begin anew to preach and teach the beauty of married love, procreation, and family life. We must have courage to speak about the harmful effects that the widespread effect of contraception and its use has on dating, relationships, and intimacy. We must help people understand that Catholic moral teaching is not an affront to personal freedom but a desire to place the gift of human sexuality and intimacy in the context of life-long relationships.

Our sexually permissive culture hides the beauty of chastity and the beauty of the "hard teachings" of the Good News. We must reclaim the beauty of chastity in all of its expressions in every state of life. We can't let the abhorrent sins of some clergy obscure the beauty of the vocation of celibacy for the Kingdom of God. In this sex-saturated culture, the counter-cultural witness of a genuinely happy, loving clergy and religious brothers and sisters is a gift to the Church and to the world (Matthew 19:12).

Strengthened Seminary Formation

Saint John Paul II, in his 1992 Apostolic Exhortation, “Pastores Dabo Vobis,” recognized that a new kind of formation was needed for men raised in an increasingly secularized culture. He called for new norms to guide the work of seminary formation, which have been in place since that time. Seminaries in the United States have expanded their formation to attend to human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation with staffs that include priests, and male and female professors, psychologists, and spiritual directors. So also, comprehensive psychological screening of all candidates for seminary and the permanent diaconate have been implemented.

As the statistics in the number of allegations made after 2002 indicate, the revised seminary formation is enhancing the formation of priests and giving the Church mature, happy men who grow into faithful and dedicated priests.

Living Stones

As we move from despair toward hope for the renewal of the Church, we must remain focused not simply on the suffering Christ, whose face we see in the victims of abuse. We must also focus on Jesus as the cornerstone of the Church, the head of the body.

Just as in a building, where the cornerstone determines the strength and direction of the walls, it is Our Lord who gives strength and direction for the Church. In the First Letter of Peter we are reminded that we are invited to come to Jesus: “Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

Here, the priesthood is that of all the baptized, the common priesthood of the faithful that calls all of us to a life of holiness. Pope Francis teaches “building the unity of the Church, constructing the Church, this temple, this unity of the Church, is the task of every Christian, of each one of us” (Homily at Santa Marta, October 14, 2014).

I ask of myself and call upon the priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, lay men and women, and young people of the diocese to renew our commitment to live the faith fully, to claim this common priesthood of baptism, which calls us to holiness. As we find ourselves in a new period in which the teaching authority of the bishops is greatly weakened, we need you, by the witness of your lives, to offer a compelling testimony to the love of Jesus Christ and the ability of our Church and its many ministries to be a force of good in the community.

We must pray fervently for all victims of sexual abuse and misconduct. We must pray for the spiritual renewal of our episcopal leadership. We must commit ourselves to full and active participation in the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

We must take every opportunity to practice acts of charity, to be the visible sign and witness of Christ’s love for our sisters and brothers who are poor, vulnerable and at the peripheries of our

communities. Only in this way can we rebuild people's trust in the spiritual and charitable life of the Church.

Live in Hope

The Apostle Paul, in the face of discouragement, imprisonment and the challenges of a young Christian community buffeted by heresy, false teaching and a world not always receptive to its message, never failed to preach hope. In the Letter to the Romans, he writes: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us... in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God... For in hope we were saved." (Romans 8:18-25).

Together, through our work and ministry undertaken by laity and clergy, we can preserve the painstaking work put in place in 2002 through the Charter for the Protection of Young People and build upon it. With these steps, my hope is you will know of my commitment to you and the Church of Richmond to ensure transparency and protection of our youth and our vulnerable, enhance and improve the structures to prevent abuse of power, and preserve and renew the Church we love.

While we recognize and address this tragedy that has engulfed our Church, we must not be mastered by it! As the People of God, we must atone for the sins that have caused it in order that we can be healed from it. We will do that through hope — hope found in Jesus, hope we receive from his Word and from the Eucharist. It is with hope that we — individually and as faith communities — will mend from the damage caused by this tragedy. As we do so, let us embrace the words of St. Paul to the Romans: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David C. Kristo".

Bishop of Richmond