



Catholic Diocese of Richmond

Office of the Bishop

August 3, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With so much happening this year and all that we've encountered as a faith community, I write this letter to connect and communicate with you on an important announcement from the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The matter centers on the issue that remains of utmost importance – the universal Church's ongoing responsibility to address the protection of children.

As a new pastoral year approaches in the fall, this responsibility necessitates we consistently review our efforts in our promise to provide a safe environment through transparency, accountability and enforcement of rigorous policies and procedures especially in our diocese. By God's grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we continue to do all we can at restoring the trust of our faithful.

As part of that effort to rebuild trust, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) on July 16, 2020, published a *Vademecum*, or instruction manual, which provides specific guidance and procedural steps to bishops, religious superiors and others when governing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy.

Why is this manual significant? The document provides best practices and step-by-step guidelines to dioceses worldwide. This handbook does not alter Church law. However, it is a critical tool and a substantial step forward in the universal Church's responsibility to protect our most vulnerable members.

This initiative is a follow-up to the Vatican summit held in February 2019 regarding the protection of minors and the need for further stringent procedures of accountability, especially for bishops, resulting from the grave sins of the actions and inactions of Church leaders. As we await the report from the Vatican on Theodore McCarrick, we recognize the importance of putting such measures into effect.

As you are aware, Pope Francis promulgated Vatican norms for the Church's handling of sex abuse in May 2019 by a *motu proprio*, titled, "*Vos estis lux mundi*" ("You are the light of the world"). Within that apostolic letter, one of the measures called for the establishment of a "metropolitan model" for the investigation of accusations of sexual misconduct against bishops and their peers.

I joined my brother bishops in approving the U.S. implementation of the directive in June 2019. Our diocesan website contains more information on the protocols for reporting abuse against bishops and about the nationwide service. I remind you that **ANY** report of child sexual abuse must be reported immediately to law enforcement and then to our diocese.

So where are we within our diocese concerning response and actions of accountability? I promised you, the faithful, of my commitment to address this wound in our local Church and to further our journey of spiritual renewal and reform. Please allow me to update you on the various mechanisms put into place within the last 18 months in our diocese:

- In June 2019, the Richmond Diocese established and began using a third-party, independent, hotline system called **EthicsPoint**. This independent reporting service allows clergy, religious, employees, volunteers, parishioners, vendors and other interested parties confidentially to report concerns about suspected financial or ethical misconduct and misuse of resources.

- High standards of professional behavior from our clergy, employees and volunteers are always expected. Effective March 28, 2020, I promulgated the Code of Ethical Conduct to strengthen and set a clear expectation of the core values and behavior that is consistent with Catholic Church teachings and required of all clergy, religious, employees and volunteers.
- In the ongoing promise in our local Church to help survivors with their healing, I directed a full audit of our clergy files by an independent entity and in February 2019, published the names of clergy with a credible and substantiated accusation of sexual abuse of a minor. This is be updated as required and includes the past assignments of our named diocesan clergy.
- One of the aspects to reconcile the sins in our local Church and repair the damage that has been done is the establishment of the Independent Reconciliation Program (IRP). It was established to assist victim survivors who were sexually abused as minors by Catholic clergy. The program, announced in February 2020, is independently administered and remains ongoing.
- Our Diocesan Review Board, which consists of lay individuals, religious and clergy, continues to review all allegations of child sexual abuse by Church personnel and recommends actions to be taken.
- In my continuous commitment for greater involvement of the laity and co-responsibility of the care of our Church, the Diocesan Pastoral Council was formed and met for the first time in August 2019. The council is one of several advisory bodies that provides valuable counsel to me and reflects the voice of the lay faithful on important matters of policy, pastoral initiatives and pastoral planning. The council is composed of nine men and nine women selected for their parish experience and leadership. They are representative of the diocese's 15 deaneries.
- Our seminarians have the opportunity of studying at some of the best seminaries in order to prepare themselves academically, pastorally and spiritually for their life of ministry. They undergo careful psychological assessments, training on child protection and reporting policies in our diocese, establishing expectations and guidelines for reporting sexual harassment as well as management courses in order to develop skills to serve as effective leaders in the Church.
- Through the VIRTUS® Protecting God's Children for Adults Program, all clergy, religious and employees are required to receive preventative and educational training that provides proactive measures on the issue of child sexual abuse. Volunteers who regularly work with children and youth are also required to take this training.

Please know I continue to hold in my heart the hurt and pain victim survivors have shared with me about the enormously profound impact these grave violations of sacred trust have had on their lives, and I will always do so. I continue to emphasize that our response will always be about what we are doing, not simply about what we have done. As we tend to the wound still healing in our Church, please join me in continuous prayer.

May the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God grant me and all in leadership understanding and strength as we continue to rebuild the sacred trust of our faithful.

Faithfully in Christ,



Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout
Bishop of Richmond