



## DIOCESE *of* LACROSSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

8 October 2018

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

May the Lord give you peace.

During the past months we have been truly aggrieved and greatly saddened by disgusting, frustrating news within our Church. All of us who experienced so much of this trauma sixteen years ago are saddened yet again to find it all rearing its ugly head with new levels of pain and sadness for those who have been abused and have had to endure so much emotional, psychological, physical and, indeed, spiritual pain. Yes, our prayerful support is with you. At this time, it seems that we are all astonished by the fact that levels of abuse and deception have been found to exist at the highest levels of our Church leadership. This fact has caused a new wave of mistrust and darkness to bring anger and bewilderment to all of us, including many of us bishops. Myself included.

I have listened to what my priests, your pastors, have had to say; I have shared discussion with my lay advisors and consultants, the Diocesan Pastoral Council; I have read the many letters and emails that you have sent to me; and I know that this is a time for prayer! This too, however, is a time for action.

I have seen in your letters the frustration of thinking that we have done nothing in our Diocese to correct this matter in the past sixteen years. Please allow me to assure you that that is not the case. Our Diocese has conformed consistently with the provisions of *The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. A lay Review Board, as mandated by the Charter, was established and has been functioning in our Diocese since 2003. The Board is composed of competent laity who have held (or currently hold) positions in psychological counseling, health care and education as well as the civil, legal and criminal justice systems. All allegations and accusations of sexual misconduct are brought to the Board for review and recommendation for action. Boundary issues and other matters of misconduct involving clergy and Church employees or volunteers are also heard and handled by the Review Board.

Further, the Diocese mandates annual training sessions, criminal background checks, and has detailed programs for all those whose work has any possible involvement with children or

young people. An annual audit is conducted for all of those involved in such work (all priests and deacons who work in the Diocese [including the bishop], seminarians, teachers, catechists, volunteers and parents) to assure that the training and requirements have been completed. In addition, every three years an audit team comes to the Diocese for an on-site audit. Finally, accounting of the accumulated annual data is managed by independent (lay operated) accounting services along with CARA – Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.)

I have also read that some of you are concerned that Diocesan funds – your support of the Church from weekly collections in your parishes and even the Diocesan Annual Appeal – have been used irresponsibly, as “hush money” in abuse cases in the Diocese. Any funds that have been offered to victims of abuse or sexual misconduct by priests or others in the Church and in this Diocese have been given for counseling, psychological services or for other victim assistance needs. Such funds have come from benefactors who have designated funds for such use, or from other Diocesan un-restricted funds or Diocesan insurance.

These areas of oversight and review have become commonplace in the Church to try our best to be sure that the evil of abuse never raises its head again among us. I take this opportunity to thank the many safe environment coordinators in our parishes and institutions for the tremendous job that they do on the local level to insure and safeguard the safety of our young people. We are doing better, but we have not completed the job. We must always be vigilant.

I am concerned about the health of our priests and future priests because it is indeed true that healthy priests do not abuse. I take seriously my obligation as Bishop to continually review the formation that the men receive from the time they apply to the Diocese, to the seminaries in which I assign them, and the early years of their priesthood.

Many of us bishops are calling upon the Pope to establish a new apostolic investigation that will include the bishops ourselves in the discipline of the *Charter* that we created in 2002. Obviously, the scandal of sexual abuse in the Church will require some deeper work and greater pain to excise the devil from our midst and to purge the evil he has brought.

Pope Saint John XXIII, in calling the Second Vatican Council, spoke of opening a new window and allowing some much needed fresh air into the Church. So many of us thought that that part was completed; that the Spirit had blown through the Church and really turned everything upside down. Perhaps not enough.

We bishops of the United States of America will gather, as we usually do, next month in Baltimore. This will be my tenth such meeting as a bishop, I believe that if we allow it, the Holy Spirit will truly breathe some fresh air into the meeting room where the successors of the Apostles will be gathered. I believe that many of us bishops and God’s faithful people are praying for it, and I ask you to join in praying for the meeting in Baltimore.

In particular, I ask that the faithful of the Diocese, join me in setting aside First Fridays as days of reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the sins committed by clergy, particularly against children and young people. I ask that the Act of Consecration of the Human Race to the Sacred Heart prayer be recited after the First Friday Masses within our Diocese. I also request that we return to the regular recitation of the St. Michael Prayer. This prayer, given to us by Pope Leo XIII, is a sure defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. Now as much as ever we need the assistance of St. Michael to help rid us, the Church, of its current evils. This can be accomplished by its recitation after the final blessing and dismissal at all public Masses. We also need the divine assistance of our Lord so I ask that in all the chapels that hold extended or perpetual adoration you designate three hours of prayer daily for the following intentions. First, pray for the victims of abuse, particularly child sexual abuse at the hands of clergy. Second, pray for the leaders of the church particularly the Bishops who will need humility and wisdom to address this current crisis. Finally, pray for yourselves and all the faithful that your faith in Jesus Christ will not falter even though some of the leaders of the Church have.

In the meanwhile, my dear brothers and sisters, please don't lose faith! This Church was established by Jesus Christ and given over to us to work it – it's not ours; it is His. It is protected and guided by His Holy Spirit. In spite of some of the big faults and failures of those who have jobs to work this Church, they can't break this Church. Don't be afraid! Someway, somehow, the Lord is going to wake up some souls in this age-in this Church- and like He has done in times past, He will renew His Church! Don't go away. Don't give up.

I hope to -continue- to see you at Sunday Mass!

Your Bishop,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ William Patrick Callahan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+Most Reverend William Patrick Callahan  
Bishop of La Crosse