



ARCHDIOCESE *of* BALTIMORE

Feb. 26, 2019

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Last week, Pope Francis convened a gathering of Catholic leaders from across the world to devise consistent global standards and protocols for how Church leaders must deal with instances of sexual abuse. The meeting represented an important milestone in the Church's long-standing efforts to rid the Church of abuse – efforts which have been undermined in the past by inconsistent and inappropriate handling of allegations.

The Church must finally get this right if we are to achieve true and lasting reform and healing, especially for those so grievously harmed. I believe the Holy Father is committed to achieving this goal.

Pope Francis rightly declared an “all-out-battle” against the scourge of sexual abuse of minors. During the Summit, he referred to these acts perpetrated by members of the clergy as “abominable crimes that must be erased from the face of the earth.” It will now fall to the leaders of the Church in the Americas, Europe and Asia to define “concrete and effective measures” that will be applied consistently regardless of geography or culture. Since 2002, such measures have been in place here in the United States. The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People requires zero tolerance, the review of all cases by lay review boards, and mandatory reporting to civil authorities, among other things. Evidence shows the Charter is working, as current allegations of child sexual abuse in the U.S. are extremely rare. But the recent case of Theodore McCarrick has exposed another area that must be addressed, that of bishops being held accountable for misconduct and handling of allegations.

In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, we have not waited to act on this important measure of accountability. Zero tolerance means zero tolerance for any person – priest, lay employee, volunteer – and yes, bishop – who commits a criminal act of sexual abuse against a minor, who sexually harasses another person or who enables such heinous conduct. And any allegation against a bishop is made directly to members of the Archdiocese’s lay child abuse review board, with instructions that criminal complaints be immediately and directly reported to police.

We have no more urgent priority or solemn task than to rid our Church of this scourge which can only be characterized as criminal and evil, and to walk the long, arduous journey toward healing with victims and all whose mental, emotional and spiritual health has been harmed by criminal acts of abuse by representatives of the Church.

Reconvening with my brother bishops here in Baltimore in June, I intend to urge that the same rigorous requirements of accountability and transparency that we have implemented within the Archdiocese of Baltimore be similarly adopted in dioceses across our country.

In my many listening sessions and discussions with you over the past year, you have made it abundantly clear that we have no time to lose – and our commitment must be absolute. I wish to assure you that I – along with my brother bishops and the lay leadership of this Archdiocese – agree fully and share this sense of urgency.

Pope Francis reiterated his commitment asserting that “the Church will spare no effort to do all that is necessary to bring to justice whosoever has committed such crimes. I stand in solidarity with him in making this same pledge on behalf of our local Church. The life and renewal of the Catholic Church depends on clear and unequivocal action. We pledge our constant efforts to restoring the trust of those the Lord has asked us to lead, and to working tirelessly to bring about the renewal that Christ offers all who trust in Him.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ William E. Lori". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue cross at the beginning.

Archbishop William E. Lori