

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last week's scathing grand jury report detailed graphic accounts of sexual abuse involving 300 priests and over 1,000 victim survivors in the State of Pennsylvania.

The grand jury findings described in horrific detail not only the abuse afflicted upon innocent children and youth by predatory clergy, but also unmasked a decades long pattern of protection, obfuscation, secrecy and concealment by bishops and Church authorities aware of this criminal behavior.

This willful negligence further victimized innocent and vulnerable children and youth not only in Pennsylvania, but in dioceses across the land.

These revelations have been the cause of embarrassment and disbelief for all of us in the Church.

The report has unleashed a torrent of righteous anger and outrage directed at bishops and diocesan officials where these patterns of negligence, denial, and obfuscation were tragically a way of doing business.

The President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, described the present moment as a "moral catastrophe" visited upon our communities, largely caused by the failure and negligence of episcopal leadership.

Such wholesale dereliction on the part of diocesan leadership requires acknowledgement, accountability and atonement.

In the name of the Church, I offer a humble apology to all of you, in my own name and on behalf of my brother bishops, also recognizing that words alone are not enough.

This apology is coupled with firm resolve that our own Diocese of Las Vegas will continue to enforce its existing policies and practices that help ensure a safe and healthy environment for our children and youth. To that end, I underscore and reaffirm our commitment to the following:

- There will continue to be zero tolerance for anyone against whom there is a credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor and a prohibition against any service, in any capacity, within the Diocese of Las Vegas;
- Every complaint of child sexual abuse will be immediately reported to local law enforcement officials for its investigation with the full backing and cooperation of the Diocese of Las Vegas;
- The Diocese will continue to rely on the wisdom and direction of the existing Oversight Review Board, whose membership includes our former retired district attorney, an individual who has served on the Nevada State Board of Nursing; a person who served three years on a federal grand jury, an attorney who does not represent the Diocese of Las Vegas, and a pastor;
- We will continue to require criminal background checks and fingerprinting processed through both the State of Nevada and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, a practice that exceeds standards established by the Dallas

Charter for all persons, paid or volunteer, serving in any capacity in the Diocese; and

- In the name of transparency, I am further proposing to the Oversight Review Board that we publish the names of those priests who have had past credible complaints of sexual abuse against minors.

In recent days, I have been encouraged by the leadership of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for formulating policies and processes to hold bishops "to the highest standards of transparency and accountability."

These goals, according to Conference President Cardinal DiNardo, "will be pursued according to three criterion: proper independence, sufficient authority and substantial leadership by the laity." The proposed policy will ultimately require the approval of Pope Francis.

This motion is the first of its kind, and in my opinion, long overdue. It will be presented to the full body of bishops at the Baltimore Assembly in November. It will have my full and unqualified support.

While these revelations are tragic and distressing, they also provide an opportunity to further purify and strengthen the Church, heal its gaping wounds, create new accountability, bring an end to secrecy and concealment, and further protect the precious children and youth of our community.

Finally, it is important that we do not permit this crises to overshadow the Church's mission and ministry work that I have repeatedly observed first-hand during my short tenure in this vibrant community.

I ask for God's abundant blessings upon you and your families, and for special blessings upon all victim survivors of sexual abuse.

I also humbly request your prayers during these difficult and trying days. We will not let darkness and shadows conceal the Son of God.

Working together we can emerge a stronger, more transparent Church and move forward into a future full of hope.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

George Leo Thomas  
Bishop of Las Vegas