



ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON

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OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

August 13, 2018

Dear Brother Priest,

This has been a challenging time for the Catholic Church and for the faithful we serve. There continues to be fallout related to the actions of Archbishop McCarrick, which we continue to address as transparently as we can. Unfortunately, we also expect that we will all begin to read and hear about a Pennsylvania Grand Jury report that is scheduled to be released tomorrow, Tuesday, August 14, that details child sexual abuse by clergy going back more than 70 years in six dioceses in that Commonwealth, including Pittsburgh.

While I, as a former Bishop of Pittsburgh, have seen parts of the report that pertain to my time there, I was not allowed to review the report in its totality. However, I have no doubt that the description of what occurred in those 70 years will be profoundly disturbing and will open wounds among the faithful that many of us thought to be healing.

The report will be a reminder of grave failings that the Church must acknowledge and for which it must seek forgiveness. It will also be a reminder that there are many survivors of such abuse whom we must continue to keep in our prayers, and whose pain we must seek to help bear and lessen through accompaniment and care.

I cannot fully express the dismay and anger I felt, when as a newly installed Bishop of Pittsburgh in 1988, I learned about the abuse some survivors experienced in my diocese. It moved me not simply to address these acts, but to be fully engaged, to meet with survivors and their families, and to do what I could to bring them comfort and try to begin a process for healing. It also urged me to develop quickly a “zero tolerance” policy for clergy who committed such abuse, and put in place a process to ensure that any allegation of abuse was addressed as fairly and forthrightly as possible.

Between 1988 and 2006, how the Church – and society as a whole – dealt with the scourge of child sex abuse evolved: mandatory reporting and adjudication of such claims, for example. But what never changed was my commitment to the survivors of the abuse and their families.

Beyond the human dimensions of the report, which should rightly take precedence, there are facets of the report I also wish to comment on. Just as important as what is in the report is what is not.

For example, in the seven or so decades that the report spans, about 1,800 or so diocesan priests served the people of Pittsburgh in their parishes and schools. More than 5,000 priests served across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in that same timeframe. During my time in Pittsburgh, including when I traveled to Rome to challenge successfully a Vatican decision to reinstate a priest removed from ministry as a result of substantiated child abuse claims, we in the diocese established strong policies that addressed the needs of abuse survivors, removed priests from ministry, and protected the most vulnerable in the community.

Thirty two (32) priests from the Diocese of Pittsburgh were referenced in the excerpts of the Grand Jury Report I was allowed to review. The Diocese investigated all allegations of child sexual abuse during my tenure there and admitted or substantiated allegations of child sexual abuse resulted in appropriate action including the removal of the priest from ministry.

In the past 30 or so years, scientific, psychological, and medical understandings of child sexual abuse evolved significantly, as did civil and Church law. But throughout my tenure in Pittsburgh, as well as here in the Archdiocese of Washington, I sought to implement child-protection policies that kept pace with or were ahead of that evolution.

While I expect that this report will be critical of some of my actions, I believe the report also confirms that I acted with diligence, with concern for the survivors and to prevent future acts of abuse. I sincerely hope that a just assessment of my actions, past and present, and my continuing commitment to the protection of children will dispel any notions otherwise made by this report.

The passing of time does not make an act of abuse against a child – or any one, for that matter – any less horrific for the community or less painful for survivors and their families. But if there is another takeaway from this report, it is that the vast majority of the cases detailed are from the past, even the distant past. The Catholic Church's commitment to rooting out those clergy who used their position of trust to betray, has made such painful stories far less prevalent. The *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* passed in Dallas in 2002 has made our child protection efforts models for other public and private institutions.

That said, the Catholic Church can never express enough our deep sorrow and contrition for the abuses of the past, and we are now in the midst of a new era where our communal bonds of trust are once again being tested by the sin of abuse. Our commitment to addressing this scourge and supporting survivors, and encouraging survivors to come forward for assistance and to seek justice must not waver.

I ask that you pray for those who have been harmed in any way by the acts of the clergy, and to encourage anyone who needs our assistance as a result of such acts to come

forward so we may help them. Let us pray for each other, and our brother priests who through association must carry with them the weight of these scandals, but who tirelessly serve the faithful in so many different ways. Finally, let us pray for the faithful and all whom we serve. Their faith may be shaken by re-experiencing the scandals of the past and what has transpired presently, but through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, may we together find our way forward, recognizing the pain and suffering experienced by the survivors and creating the structures and procedures which will help us to continue to improve our ability to address the problem of abuse. Also, we must acknowledge the hurt and anger expressed by the faithful Catholics in the pews and commit to them our steadfast resolve to handle accusations of abuse properly and transparently.

Asking's God's blessings on you as you continue to serve his people, and with every personal good wish, I am

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald Cheadle". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Archbishop of Washington