



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As many of you are aware, a statewide Grand Jury has been investigating clergy sexual abuse of minors in six Pennsylvania dioceses. This past week, the Report was released, and it includes incidents of past abuse in the Diocese of Allentown.

Abuse is abhorrent and has no place in the Church, or anywhere in society. Most of the incidents date back decades. The offending priests are no longer in active ministry, are laicized (defrocked), or are deceased.

Since 2002, our Diocese has taken strong and decisive actions to address abuse. Our goal is to prevent it from happening again, but that does not change the fact that the abuse of children is terrible and sinful. The abuse was devastating and tragic for the victims and survivors, and continues to cause pain and anger to this very day. I ask forgiveness of victims and their families who have lived with this burden, sometimes for many years.

As your Bishop, I am deeply saddened by these incidents. I sincerely apologize for the past sins and crimes committed by some members of the clergy. I apologize to the survivors of abuse and their loved ones. For the times when those in the Church did not live up to Christ's call to holiness, and did not do what needed to be done, I apologize.

I also apologize to you, the faithful of the Diocese, for the toll this issue has taken over the years: the sadness, the anger, the doubts, and the embarrassment it may have brought you as a Catholic. I ask for your forgiveness, and I thank you for your perseverance and for your courageous witness to our faith.

I want to assure you that as a Church, we will learn from the Report of the Grand Jury and use it to further improve our protections for children and young people.

Sadly, abuse still is part of the society in which we live. We acknowledge our past failures, and we are determined to do what is necessary to protect the innocent, now and in the future.

As your Bishop, my first priority is keeping our children safe.

For the past sixteen years, the Diocese of Allentown has had a policy of zero tolerance. We report cases of abuse of minors to the authorities, and perpetrators are no longer in active ministry.

We require rigorous background checks. We have 123 designated Safe Environment Coordinators in our parishes, schools, and ministries. We have trained more than 38,000 adults on how to recognize and respond to abuse. More than 5,000 people have taken Mandated Reporter Training. Children in our schools and religious education programs receive age-appropriate abuse-prevention training every year.

We are focused on re-establishing trust among all those who rely on the Catholic Church for help, for spiritual guidance, and for strength.

We are thankful for the vast majority of our Clergy and Religious who had absolutely no involvement in the unholy behavior of the past, and who continue to work every day for you, the People of God, in the Diocese of Allentown.

And so, my message to you today is one of hope, that the work we are doing will ensure that our precious children are protected, and that the sins of the few will not dilute your faith in our Church today.

Every time we celebrate Sunday Mass, we recite the Nicene Creed, which includes these words: “I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.”

Our Church is indeed holy. It nurtures us and offers us the necessary means to salvation. Because it was founded by our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Church remains holy in its mission, even when some of its people are sinful. In spite of this human sinfulness, our Church is still here for all of us. It always will be, just as Christ promised. The Church will remain our foundation and our source of grace.

So I ask you today to join me as we pray for the victims and survivors of these reprehensible acts. Through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, we ask God for the strength to heal and for the grace to walk together as one family of faith.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Alfred A. Schlert
Bishop of Allentown