



**A letter to the Faithful of the Diocese regarding News Story
The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
June 28, 2017**

I write to inform you of a news story that was recently reported by the media about an anonymous letter concerning a non-Charter personnel matter involving a priest of the Diocese of Sioux Falls and local parish personnel more than two years ago. As you know, personnel matters pastorally and legally (civil and canonical) require confidentiality to protect all parties, those who in confidence bring forth complaints and those who are the subject of those complaints.

In a continuation of the transparency our Diocese has offered while I have been bishop, I agreed to be interviewed by KELO-TV the only media outlet who contacted us about the letter. I participated in the interview and discussed general Diocesan policy in these kinds of matters. I did not discuss the alleged facts in this instance or any other instance and made clear our policy to protect the confidentiality of personnel information.

Let me state emphatically that in accordance with this policy, any allegations in any area presented by parties who identify themselves are taken seriously, assured confidentiality and dealt with appropriate to the facts presented. The Diocese offers assistance in obtaining counseling and spiritual support in any such matter to be used at the discretion of the parties involved.

For instance when allegations of child abuse by clergy or others are made to the Diocese, the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People is completely and with firm resolve implemented including notification of government authorities; these are evil and criminal acts. And while these issues were discussed in the interview, the complaint that came forward in this instance was not about child abuse thus Charter protocols did not apply.

The unknown persons who wrote this anonymous letter are likely not the ones who filed the initial complaint. Rather, these authors with no firsthand knowledge of all the facts, the appropriate civil and canon law, or how the matter was actually handled, sent additional anonymous letters to others most of whom have no responsibility in these matters. I am sorry

that they were drawn into this matter when it should have been addressed to me directly. The people behind these letters never directly contacted me or anyone on the Chancery staff.

The anonymous letter contained a threat, unless I and other Church leaders took certain specified actions by a certain date, unsubstantiated and derogatory allegations about me, others and the diocese would be made public. In other words it was a deliberate effort to coerce me and others to compromise the grave responsibilities of the office of the bishop to protect the rights of all, an office I hold in stewardship only for a time.

These types of actions are morally and legally reprehensible. I could never in good conscience dignify the threats or act in accordance with the demands without documented verification of the claims.

At the time this matter was brought to my attention more than two years ago, an investigation was conducted and the complaint responded to in ways consistent with Diocesan policy. Outside counsel was involved in this process and has reviewed how this was dealt with. I was advised that the Diocese handled the matter appropriately in all material respects.

As in the disposition of any complaint people of good will might disagree with the process used or how it was ultimately dealt with. But such opinion is often based on an incomplete understanding of all the facts and legal requirements involved both within and without the Church. I remain convinced that this matter was appropriately handled at the time and have received no new information that would lead me to believe otherwise.

Late last week we also learned of recordings that were made of confidential personnel conversations on Church property. I believe that anonymous and unfounded allegations potentially destructive to personal reputations and the work of the church to be morally disheartening and legally disturbing and I could never in conscience dignify the threats or act in accordance with the demands without substantial verification of the underlying claims.

Because of how these anonymous people have acted in this matter, we are unfortunately witnessing the release of a public story based on incomplete facts and false accusations. The anonymous letter writer(s) know this and deliberately chose this course of action to cause the greatest possible damage to the Church and the individuals involved. Let us rise above this kind of false witness and continue to act in accordance with what is right and just for all.

I encourage all those who believe that they have been hurt or harmed by anyone acting in any way in the name of the Church to report their concerns to government officials and/or to the diocese. I apologize to and ask forgiveness from all who may have been harmed in this way. As has been true in similar instances over the years all appropriate action will be undertaken to assure a safe environment, address specific situations and encourage healing.

Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Church and Mother of us all, pray for us.