



Statement to the Clergy, Consecrated and Lay of the Diocese
From the Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
August 16, 2018
Feast of Saint Stephen of Hungary

RESPONSE TO REVELATIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF MINORS BY CLERGY

Recent revelations released by the Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania concerning child sexual abuse by clergy in many of the dioceses in that state and the lack of appropriate response by some bishops over seven decades have shocked, sickened and saddened us all. The graphic details reveal that the innocence and dignity of young children were violated by priests ordained to minister in the name of Christ through His Church who betrayed like Judas their ordination promises. I fully share the disgust and anger of all affected especially the victims and their families, and all faithful Catholics.

The shock and sadness at these recent revelations is enhanced by the disclosure that former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick had abused youth and young adult seminarians placed in his care. As a bishop I am ashamed and angry with his fraudulent and deceptive participation in Church affairs at home and abroad over so many years. His misconduct is compounded by what appears to be a cover-up by some Church officials that resulted in his promotion rather than his accountability. The full details will be addressed in a canonical trial in the near future.

This is not the Church I professed faith in some 35 years ago. In truth it is not the Church Christ instituted. It is the work of the evil one and those who have given in to him.

Clearly a full investigation in pursuit of truth and justice with complete transparency of its results must be courageously undertaken without concern for how painful its conclusions might be. We bishops no longer have the credibility to do so ourselves. Professionally-experienced and committed lay leadership must guide this necessary investigation so that such egregious personal and ecclesial misbehavior does not happen again and so that procedures for accountability of bishops are more clearly defined.

To the victims of the heinous abuses, words and apologies can never be sufficient to overcome the harm done to you. However, I wish you and all victims to know that you are being heard and responded to. What happened to you was wrong and sinful for which, in the name of the Church, I apologize. The lingering effects of the violations to your dignity we know are real. I am sorry that you bear these wounds. I ask all Catholics of our diocese to join me in praying for you and all victims of child sexual abuse wherever it occurred.

In the near future I will pray a Mass of Forgiveness for the sins and failings of those who under the cover of the Church violated children and for the healing of those harmed by them. Jesus said, “come to me those who are burdened and I will give you rest.” (Mt 25:40) Jesus is the salve for hurt and the instrument of healing.

Attempts to keep child abuse from public light and accountability diminish the confidence Catholics ought to have in us bishops and other Church leaders. I express my profound sorrow, embarrassment, and deep regret to all harmed, no matter how long ago, and ask your forgiveness.

If you have been harmed at the hands of a minister or volunteer, whether ordained or lay, I encourage you to report it to local law enforcement. I invite anyone who has been harmed to also come to the diocese where supportive assistance will be offered. The Diocesan Victim’s Assistance Coordinator stands ready to listen to you and to walk with you as you seek ways to heal the hurts caused by others.

The Diocese of Sioux Falls has adhered to and benefitted from the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* adopted sixteen years ago by the Catholic Bishops of the United States which continues to guide how we as a Diocese respond to allegations of sexual abuse of a minor by anyone acting under the mantle of the Church. This includes raising the awareness of all who minister in the Church that this evil is a possibility in our parishes and schools and that we must be ever alert to its destructive presence.

It is important to recognize that such dreadful sins were perpetrated by only a small number of the many thousands of priests over the years and hidden by only a small number of bishops. Yet we are all tainted by the sinful behaviors of others. Most priests courageously and sacrificially serve the faithful, yet always under the threat of an accusation. They deserve the opportunity for due process to protect their good name and their vocation.

I am grateful to the Diocesan Review Board members, the majority of which are accomplished laity, who have and continue to serve in the important role of advising my predecessors and me on the credibility of accusations of child sexual abuse that come forward. The Review Board also holds the Diocese accountable for ensuring that pastoral and practical outreach is provided to victims who come forward and to priests unjustly accused.

Thank you for your attention to this statement and for your prayers.

The evil one is real, taunting and challenging us. Jesus crucified and risen is also real. He instituted the Church and governs her still. We take solace in His promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against her, as hard as that seems in times like these to believe. I do believe. That is the Church I professed faith in so many years ago and reaffirm today.

May Christ, the Divine Physician, heal those who have been harmed, and may Mary, Mother of the Church, intercede for those entrusted to the care of her Son’s children that we may live up to our high calling.