



DIOCESE *of* LACROSSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

21 June 2019

My dear brother priests, deacons, members of consecrated life and the lay faithful of the diocese,

Brothers and Sisters in Christ all

May the Lord give you Peace.

This last month has been filled with many powerful and important events in my life as well as the life of the Church. In May, I was on a pilgrimage to France where I made a visit to Lourdes and asked for our Blessed Mother's continued help in my ministry as your Bishop and as a successor of the Apostles.

In the almost nine years I have served as your Bishop there has been much joy in bringing the sacraments, particularly those of Eucharist and Confirmation, to you the faithful of the diocese. During this time there has also been the weight of the past misdeeds of some of our clergy and this last year the sadness of the revelation of just how far this evil extends into the hierarchy of the Church. Know of the sadness and anger I personally have because of these truths but also how seriously I take them as your Bishop and as a member of the hierarchy.

While we have addressed directly the evil of the sexual abuse of children beginning with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* in 2002 commonly known as the *Dallas Charter*, this has not been all we have done. While the Safe Environment program that the charter requires for every diocese, is in place and has been effective, this is only the beginning of what we have and will continue to do to ensure the safest possible environment for your children and young people and truly for all people who come in contact with the Church in any way.

One of the most important ways we can ensure a safe environment around the issue of clerical sexual abuse is to strengthen the quality and holiness of our seminarians and young priests. This begins with the formation programs we use to prepare them for ministry as deacons and priests. We have recognized two areas that needed to be strengthened and have adopted two new programs that helping these young men to be more prepared for their service to the church. The first is named *Journey* where young men interested in the seminary spend one year before being accepted as a seminarian growing in their knowledge of the faith and the expectations of what the priestly life will entail. Then comes the rigorous application process where the candidate is thoroughly vetted before being accepted as a seminarian. In the seminary years, our diocese has established a program named *Regency*. It is in its fourth year of operation and gives those seminarians who struggle to succeed in the intellectual environment of academics at a Seminary an opportunity to step away to focus on addressing Human Formation issues that might stem from unaddressed traumas of their past. These programs, along with the excellent work

of the seminaries we choose to send our men to, goes a long way to ensuring the healthiest young men possible for the service to the Church as deacons and priests.

The care for these young men does not end with ordination and their first assignments. We gather with those priests ordained five years and under four times a year ensuring they are receiving the support they need as they adjust to priestly life. We also plan for them to be Associate Pastors for four years and to have a mentoring pastor as well. All of this to ensure the healthiest priest we can hope for because “a healthy priest does not abuse.”

Many of you may remember with sadness, disappointment and even some anger last November when the Holy Father put on hold any votes on procedures that would address the crisis of abuse or cover-up by bishops by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB). This was disappointing to myself and many of my brother bishops but we respected the Holy Father’s wishes and waited for the consultation that occurred during the Synod on Young People in October of 2018 and the gathering of all of the presidents of National Conferences of Bishops from around the world that occurred last February. This resulted in an Apostolic Letter in the form of “*Motu Proprio*” *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, that underscores his concern and attentiveness to the topics addressed within the new procedural norms that apply universally, that is to the Catholic Church around the world.

These new procedural norms that address the reporting and investigating of claims of abuse or the intentional mishandling of these cases by bishops were incorporated into the documents approved last week at the June assembly of the USCCB. Three documents were voted on and approved. One deals with bishops who were removed from office or resigned their office for reasons of sexual abuse or intentional mishandling of cases (Protocols). One reaffirms the commitments bishops make to live according to the Gospel and to place themselves under the same high standards applied to their priests, deacons and lay personnel (Commitments). The final document deals specifically with the reporting and investigation of complaints against bishops (Directives).

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), made up of all the dioceses of the state of Wisconsin, has already begun to look at the Directives and Protocols in order to put in place the proper procedures should there be a need for an investigation of one of the bishops of our state.

Within the diocese, we have also been busy. We recently completed an independent audit of our files as well as the procedures in place concerning any accusation of sexual abuse of a minor by clergy. With this independent review complete, we are taking the final steps to greater transparency through the release of the names of clerics who have substantiated incidents of sexual abuse of a minor.

To prepare for this I have directed an updating of the *Child Sexual Abuse Policy and Procedures of the Diocese of La Crosse*, commonly referred to as the *Green Book*. This update will include information from the Holy Father’s *Motu Proprio*. I am also reconstituting the Diocesan Review Board. This group has served us well over the years and I thank the members for their service. I desire the Review Board to be as independent as possible so certain positions that keep it from functioning as truly independent, such as the diocesan attorney, will not be on the new board so there will be no conflicts of interest.

The audit process has also revealed a need for an independent investigator that will report straight to the Review Board Chair, while investigations have occurred in the past they were often conducted by a

member of the staff or through our attorney. For the purpose of transparency and trust an independent investigator is being hired.

Finally, with the release of names often comes new accusations wanting a process that is not only just but smooth and timely. We need to ensure that those people who are the Intake Coordinators and Victim Assistants are capable of handling the possible increase in cases. Once these steps are completed a final review of names of substantiated offenders will be finalized. Communications to victims, relatives, priests and parishes will be done and a public list of substantiated offenders will be posted. While I desire this to move quickly, it is much more important that it be done well, so by the end of the year we will have all these steps accomplished and the list published.

I am learning that I can never say enough how sorry I am and how angry and sad it makes me that this evil has been found within the Church and even among its leaders. Recently I was touched by the second reading from Saint Paul to the Romans

*Brothers and sisters:
Therefore, since we have been justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom we have gained access by faith
to this grace in which we stand,
and we boast in hope of the glory of God.
Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions,
knowing that affliction produces endurance,
and endurance, proven character,
and proven character, hope,
and hope does not disappoint,
because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

So let us live in Hope that the Holy Spirit through this time of trial might help us be transformed to the people of endurance and proven character we so desire to be.

With personal good wishes and prayers, I am,

Very truly yours in Christ,

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Most Reverend William Patrick Callahan
Bishop of La Crosse