



BISHOP OF SAULT STE. MARIE

RESPONSE TO THE SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

September 20, 2018

To all Clergy, Religious and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie,

This summer has been a painful time for most Catholics. The multiplication of media headlines about abuse of minors and adults by a cardinal and by priests in the United States, as well as the tragic stories of abuse in Chili and many other countries were disturbing and disheartening. A few weeks ago, the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report on sexual abuse by clergy was released publically. This led to a wave of sadness, anger, shame, frustration and discouragement within the Church, including our own diocese.

Today, I write to you as your Pastor, filled with compassion for the victims of abuse, as well as for all the faithful, especially those in our diocese, who are also wounded as they learn of these crimes.

In his recent letter to the People of God, Pope Francis wrote, *"the pain of the victims and their families is also our pain, and so it is urgent that we once more reaffirm our commitment to ensure the protection of minors and of vulnerable adults... Looking back to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient. Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated."*

To this end, the Diocese has developed and enforces a Safe Environment Policy, a Screening program and Guidelines for dealing with complaints of sexual abuse of children and sexual assault of adults. These can be found on the diocesan website. Personally, I take very seriously any indication of potential sexual abuse, harassment or abuse of power. In such situations, immediate action is taken either to report allegations of abuse or to investigate complaints of harassment or misconduct. I ask all priests and parishioners to remain very vigilant and to report to me any sign or fact that could suggest a possible abuse.

With the help of new guidelines coming from the Conference of Canadian Catholic Bishops this fall, I plan on improving our protocols and safeguarding efforts. I also want to provide better pastoral care to victims and their families so that a healing process can be assured. To be successful, I will call upon the laity to help us make things right. So now is not the time to leave the Church even though you might be tempted to do so. As any person who is hurting, the Church also needs love, care, understanding and guidance. Let us create a space where victims can be heard, cared for and surrounded by God's healing grace.

Let us pray for all those who have been abused, deceived, discouraged, repelled and frustrated: may God, in His infinite mercy and gentleness, bring them healing and comfort. May we also be grateful for the many priests who remain faithful to their vocation and strive to live in holiness. Let us provide them the support they need as they struggle during these difficult times. Together, may we all find courage in the solidarity we share and in the belief that God walks with His wounded Church.

Yours in Christ,

+ Marcel Damphousse, Bishop of Sault Ste. Marie

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