



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

Office of the Bishop

August 16, 2018

Dear Friends in Christ,

The news over these past few weeks regarding clerical abuse in the Catholic Church has been a shameful reminder of our past. My prayers today are with the survivors of sexual abuse. I am truly sorry for the pain you have endured. The survivors who have come forward to tell their stories are courageous. I encourage others to do the same. The Catholic Church is willing to help. If you or someone you know has a report of sexual abuse which occurred in the Church, please contact our victim assistance coordinator at 616-243-0491, and the appropriate law enforcement agency.

Personally, I am deeply sorry for these instances which have caused many Catholics to lose faith. Clergy, men who were supposed to lead men and women to Christ, abused their power, committed sin, and inflicted deep spiritual, mental, and emotional wounds. These are wounds which can only be healed by Christ the Divine Physician.

I can understand your anger with the bishops over these recent reports. I promise to continue working toward concrete measures that protect our young people. During the height of the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church in 2002, St. John Paul II addressed the cardinals of the United States. His words still reverberate today:

"It must be absolutely clear to the Catholic faithful, and to the wider community, that Bishops and superiors are concerned, above all else, with the spiritual good of souls. People need to know that there is no place in the priesthood and religious life for those who would harm the young."

Following these reports in 2002, the bishops of the United States endorsed the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. It has been renewed three times since 2002, with the most recent renewal coming earlier this summer. This document established norms and policies which help keep our young people safe. This document lays out the requirements of every volunteer, staff member, teacher, and clergy member to participate in training which teaches how to recognize signs of abuse, ways to guard against abuse, and how to protect children from abuse. It also requires every person who has contact with children to agree to a background check, and in some cases to be fingerprinted. Every member of our clergy undergoes an extensive psychological evaluation and background checks while in formation. Let me reiterate, the diocese has a zero-tolerance policy for anyone in the Church who abuses a child. The Diocese of Grand Rapids takes every allegation of abuse seriously and investigates it to the fullest extent. Our review board is comprised of two priests and seven lay members, including a

retired judge, retired FBI officer, therapists, and educators. We immediately report these allegations to the proper local authorities and fully cooperate with their investigations. In the cases of substantiated reports, the names of the accused are publicly released.

In the sixteen years since the Charter was established, almost 23,000 people have been trained through Protecting God's Children sessions in our diocese. In this past fiscal year alone, more than 65 training sessions were held throughout our eleven counties.

Some of the recent news reports involve clerical abuse which occurred within a seminary. This is no place where a man who is discerning God's call for his life should ever feel vulnerable. I have complete confidence in our two seminaries; Saint John Vianney at the University of Saint Thomas in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and the University of Saint Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois. I have personally spoken with our diocesan seminarians and told them that they should immediately inform the rectors or our vocations directors of any improper conduct. They will not face any reprisals.

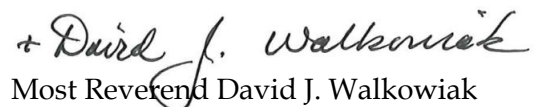
I am proud to be the bishop of our priests who are faithful and true to their calling. These holy men serve tirelessly and work constantly for the protection of young people in our diocese. Please support our priests and offer them encouragement in their work.

We bishops must redouble our resolve to eradicate these sins from within our beloved Church. We will review the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* and enact additional concrete measures which aim to ensure that this will never happen in our Church again. As leaders we will continue to seek answers, as Cardinal DiNardo, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, stated on August 1:

"The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops will pursue the many questions surrounding Archbishop McCarrick's conduct to the full extent of its authority; and where that authority finds its limits, the Conference will advocate with those who do have the authority. One way or the other, we are determined to find the truth in this matter."

Please join with me in prayer. We pray for the survivors of sexual abuse and their families that their wounds may be healed by our ever-loving God. Please pray for our seminarians, our priests, and me, that God's grace and mercy may allow us to overcome our human failings. We also pray for the Catholic Church that she may be the beacon of Christ's light in this dark world.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of Grand Rapids