

BISHOP VANN REFLECTS ON RECENT ABUSE SCANDALS

My dear sisters and brothers in the Lord,

It is with the utmost sorrow that I write to you in this time of great scandal and tribulation in our Church. Many people in leadership, particularly among the episcopacy, have failed the people of God. There can be no ambiguity about this.

As your spiritual father and the shepherd of this Diocese, I have prayed, struggled, and reflected a great deal these past few weeks in order to determine how I can best serve you.

The release of the Pennsylvania's Grand Jury report yesterday confirms that we who lead the Church have a great responsibility to take action against a predation that can only be called satanic.

After I was appointed to our Diocese I began to meet regularly with our Oversight Review Board, whose charge it is to advise me on matters concerning accusations of sexual abuse of a minor perpetrated by a cleric. Based on the painful experiences in my home Diocese of Springfield, Illinois during Bishop Daniel Ryan's tenure which resulted in a devastating loss of trust, I wanted to take every opportunity to create a truly safe environment, including reviewing allegations involving adults, not just minors. I regularly seek the members of this group to offer their observations and advice on a variety of matters that came to the attention of the Diocese. Their counsel has been invaluable and a great help in dealing with matters of misconduct, regarding both clerical and lay matters.

Their membership includes ten lay experts, one priest, and one religious sister. Five diocesan employees also staff the Board, three of whom are clergy and two lay. I am grateful to all of the members for their sage advice and willingness to serve. In addition, I urge anyone who has been a victim of clerical abuse in our Diocese to report the abuse by calling our toll free number: (800) 364-3064.

In light of the revelations surrounding Archbishop McCarrick, not to mention the situations in Honduras and Chile, I now know that the review process needs to be expanded to include claims from seminarians and priests so that they, too, are protected from sexual abuse by those in power. Additionally, I will review our process with my leadership team to confirm that it is as robust as possible.

Canon law provides for judicial processes to try all clergy, including bishops, who are charged with canonical crimes. Make no mistake, sexual crimes against the faithful are serious violations of

Church law. As a canon lawyer, I know also that these canonical processes were strengthened by Pope Francis as recently as 2016. It goes without saying that there are civil and criminal recourses, as well.

I appreciate the righteous anger expressed toward those who have failed to follow due process and the demands of accountability. I also want to assure you that I am committed to join with my brother bishops to address these failings. A competent independent national investigative body comprised of qualified professionals needs to be created so that if we have systemic issues within our Church, they can be thoroughly reviewed and addressed. I pledge my support to this and will allocate diocesan funds for this purpose.

Unequivocally, I join my brother bishops who have already spoken out to identify the root cause as a crisis in holiness. Shepherds who sincerely seek the Lord do not abuse the power that Our Lord has entrusted to them. Those who abuse this holy office fail Christ and his Church.

In this difficult time, please join with me to pray that our Church be purified, that all the people who have been wounded by abuse on the part of the clergy experience healing, and that I, along with the rest of Church leadership, act with wisdom, courage, and humility to fulfill the office that the Lord has entrusted to us.

On this, the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, I pray that she be consoled to see the truth of these injustices coming to light so that her children may be part of a Church that is worthy of them and of her Son.

With gratitude for your support and appreciation for your continued prayers,

Bishop Kevin W. Vann

Editor's Note: The following reflection from Bishop Kevin Vann was written and submitted to OC Catholic newspaper on Wednesday, August 15, the feast day of the Assumption of Our Lady.

For the Holy Father's letter, please visit:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didio.html

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/psalms/51:12>