



My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

At this time of the year, there is so much around us that reminds us of the approach of the Christmas season. As Catholics, our way of preparing for the arrival of our Savior is by entering into the season of Advent. In our tradition, Advent is a time of looking forward with hope and of realizing that we are people gifted with the knowledge that God calls us to holiness and a deep love and respect for every person, especially those who are most vulnerable.

That is why this moral catastrophe we find ourselves in with regard to crimes against children and young people perpetrated by clergy – even those among the highest leadership in the Church -- can only be characterized as an extraordinary evil. The crimes alleged against Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick and those named in the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report are so reprehensible, so disgusting that their revelation fills me with shock, horror, anger, deep sadness and a broken heart -- just as it does for every Catholic.

I am profoundly sorry for the deep pain and tremendous suffering that has been endured by so many at the hands of members of the clergy. In a particular way, I sincerely apologize to those who suffered clergy sexual abuse as children and had to walk through life enduring this unimaginable burden. I also apologize to all the Catholics in our community who have had to endure this ongoing stream of unbelievable news about abuse: sexual abuse, abuse of authority and abuse of trust. I have heard your voices, I have seen your letters and I understand your anger, outrage, sadness and your demand for reform in the Church. I share your feelings.

I believe that we as a Church are in need of serious, meaningful reform and clear action. I also believe that extensive engagement of the laity is essential in whatever processes for purification we adopt. We must be willing to do all that is necessary to create an environment within the Church in which abuse by those in authority is dealt with honestly, openly and appropriately. I believe that with the help of the Holy Spirit and people who care deeply for the Church, that will be done.

I want to assure everyone that I am deeply committed to combatting all forms of abuse in the Church and to working with my brother bishops, professional experts, the laity and other interested parties of goodwill here and across the country to root out any remaining vestiges of a culture within the Church that allowed clerics -- even bishops -- to prey on the vulnerable and avoid just punishment for their wrongdoing.

It is important to recognize all of the good work done in our diocese since 2002 to promote healing and to implement programs developed to ensure a safe environment for children, and those who worked so hard in these areas. Since the adoption of its "Policy for the Safety of Children in Matters of Sexual Abuse" in 2003, the diocese has devoted much time and effort in the areas of abuse reporting, screening and education. In accord with this policy, all allegations of child sexual abuse are reported to both civil authorities and the diocese's Review Board. This lay board, which includes a pastor, has the responsibility – in addition to civil authorities – for a thorough investigation. Clerics are permanently removed from ministry if it is established by an admission, conviction in criminal court, or by way of appropriate canonical process that they have sexually abused a minor -- even once. Those who have been so deeply hurt by abuse are offered assistance and professional counseling to help with their healing. All Church personnel – including clergy and religious and all lay employees and volunteers – who in any way work with children must pass recurring criminal and sex offender background checks. Over 154,000 clerics, religious and lay employees and volunteers have been specially trained to understand, spot and report any activity that suggests abuse. While these good, strong programs remain in place, all of us must be ever watchful in our efforts to prevent child abuse and to remain deeply sensitive to the needs of those who continue to suffer as a result of such abuse.

One crucial element of the healing process is to publicly acknowledge and identify those clergy who have sexually abused children within the diocese. The Diocese of Cleveland recognized the importance of this step early in 2002, when it first began to publish the names of those clerics removed from ministry as a result of sexual abuse of a minor. These postings can be found on our public website (dioceseofcleveland.org) by clicking the Child Protection tab and then clicking "News and Notices." We continue to publish these names to this day, updating the postings when additional clerics have been removed from ministry as a result of sexual abuse of a minor. Furthermore, I recently directed diocesan staff to conduct a review of the information currently posted there and to compile this information in a more user-friendly list format. This listing will now also include the names of those clerics -- whether living or deceased -- who we can determine sexually abused a minor and/or who were removed from ministry prior to April 2002 as a result of sexual abuse of a minor.

In addition to what we are doing locally, I appreciate the USCCB as it works to establish action plans related to the investigation, reporting and resolving of any allegations brought against bishops. It is my hope that this initiative will include substantial lay leadership and will be vested with the proper authority and independence.

I ask that the entire Diocese of Cleveland pray for those who have been harmed by sexual abuse at the hands of clergy and for the guidance of Christ through the healing process. Together with our staff and organizations within the diocese, we recommit ourselves to ensuring that all preventative measures are taken and that allegations of abuse are reported to the proper authorities.

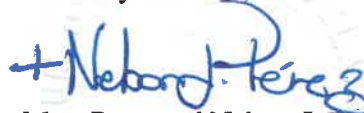
As I express my deepest sorrow and offer my sincere apology to all, I wish to assure everyone that the Diocese of Cleveland does not tolerate the sexual abuse of children and will not allow clerics to remain in ministry if they have sexually abused a child -- even once. As the resurgent news of this crisis in the Church unfolds and touches the lives of all of us, I urge anyone who has suffered clergy sexual abuse to call the police and/or the children's services agency in the county in which they live as well as the diocesan response line at 216-334-2999 or contact us online at response_services@dioceseofcleveland.org. **For additional information and answers to frequently asked questions on this issue, visit dioceseofcleveland.org/childprotection/questions.**

I also wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to the people of the Diocese of Cleveland for your strong love and faithfulness to the Lord. I am also thankful to all those throughout the diocese, including our faithful priests and deacons, our religious sisters and brothers, our lay ecclesial ministers, campus ministers, our teachers and catechists, administrators, employees and volunteers and all those who have worked so hard to ensure the safety of our children.

The season of Advent is one of hope and gratefulness in the Lord. St. Paul, in his Letter to the Philippians, reminds us of this when he writes, "Brothers and sisters: Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: Rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near." Indeed the Lord is near and due to his divine presence we look to the future with hope and confidence. Soon we will rejoice in the celebration of our Savior's incarnation, remembering the words of St. Matthew, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us.'"

As God is always with us, may he guide our actions that together we do all that is necessary to face the challenges we need to confront at this moment with a faith-filled, steadfast and committed heart.

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend Nelson J. Perez, D.D.
Bishop of Cleveland