

August 17, 2018

To the Parishioners of Immaculate Conception,
and to People of Good Will everywhere,

By now, most of us have heard about the Pennsylvania grand jury investigation detailing the widespread and pervasive abuse of children by Catholic priests under their care, along with the realization that bishops too often did nothing. I've read much of the actual report. It's very hard to read it calmly. There are some descriptions within it that I will never be able to "un-read." I am shocked, sickened, and very angry that Catholic priests – not one, but *hundreds* – preyed on our youth for decades. I was aware – we were all made aware – that this had happened, as the truth was laid bare for us all back in 2002 when the scandal broke. I thought I had understood the magnitude of the problem. I was very wrong. The Church has endured scandals and evils before, but not like this. This is truly diabolical in its scope, magnitude, and capacity for evil.

There's a lot I want to say. A simple letter like this cannot state them all. And I'm sure that many of you have questions that, like me, demand answers.

Right now, from where I am, all I can offer is my sincere apologies for how the institutional church has repeatedly let you down. You are owed that much. This travesty is intolerable, inexcusable, and indefensible. I know that my apology amounts to nothing, but it's all I have. That, and the promise that this will not happen again. Not on my watch. Not on our watch.

If any good news can be gleaned from any of this it's what the report *didn't* say, which is that policies are in place throughout the country that have effectively put an end to this behavior. Zero tolerance policies, mandatory child protection training for all who work with children, independent investigations of seminaries and places of formation, revamping the internal law of the Church (the code of Canon Law) to address abuse allegations, and mandatory reporting of abuse to the authorities are not only in place now, but have been for decades. In fact, while one abusive event is bad, the vast majority of abuse cases happened prior to 1990. And all clergy members with a substantiated allegation of child abuse are no longer in ministry. Anywhere. The system is working. We've learned, and will continue to learn, from this tragedy. No one else needs to suffer like this.

Now we still have our work cut out for us. We need to remain vigilant: if you see something, say something, to the police. This happened for so long because no one said anything. We need to continue to develop a caring, compassionate culture so that abuse victims will be willing to come forward and share their story. We've learned that this problem is not solely found in the Catholic Church. Teachers, ministers in other religions, and even family members can and have abused children. The lessons we have paid for dearly can help others outside of our fold. *If you see something, say something.*

We need to hold people accountable, all the way up the chain of command. For example, it recently came to light that Archbishop McCarrick was involved in no less than three legal settlements involving him having sex with adults. How is it that he could be reassigned from the Archdiocese of Newark to here with this type of personal baggage? The Pope is the one who transfers bishops; in McCarrick's case, that would have been Pope John Paul II. Was the Pope informed of McCarrick's full history? If not, why not? Pope Francis needs to form a commission to investigate this. Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston recently voiced his strong reservations regarding the lack of accountability of his fellow bishops for their failures as well as his intention to outline his concerns personally to the Holy Father. This

gives me hope that necessary change in this area will happen soon.

But while accountability is important and essential for healing to begin and trust to be restored, we also need to remember to pray. We need to pray for victims, those who have come forward, those who have not, and those who have died. We need to pray for all those involved, that the truth may be revealed and that conversion and repentance may occur. We need to pray for each other, that we may not give in to cynicism and hate, which would just make us new victims of violence. It is only through the grace of God that we can get through the sorrows of life, and it is only through embracing the totality of the Gospel message that life makes any sense.

Again, I ask for your forgiveness for those who have let us down. I know my apology won't fix anything, but please understand I am truly, truly sorry for any pain you are enduring. Please contact me if you want to talk or vent. Really. Thank you for all that you do, and thank you for being a part of our community. May God continue to bless and sustain us all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Michael Tietjen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr. Michael Tietjen
Pastor
Immaculate Conception Church