



# SAINT PATRICK PARISH

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF HUDSON, WISCONSIN

November 9, 2018

The Most Reverend James Powers  
Bishop of the Diocese of Superior  
1201 Hughitt Ave  
PO Box 969  
Superior, WI 54880

Dear Bishop Powers:

We, the members of the Pastoral Council of Saint Patrick Church in Hudson, are writing this letter on behalf of the parish regarding the on-going crisis of sexual abuse and failures of leadership in our Church today. In conjunction with our Pastor, the Pastoral Council has been engaging the laity of the parish in a series of discussions and has formed a Task Force to address this matter.

Within this letter and the two attachments, we wish to communicate to you our concerns, our desire for change and the concrete actions that we believe can be taken. We are writing because we respect your office and you personally, and because it is our role as lay Catholics to appropriately participate in the governance of the institutional Church. We hope and pray you will take these matters seriously as you work to improve our Diocese and greater universal Church.

First, we would like to thank you for your leadership during these difficult times. We appreciate that you came to Saint Patrick Parish and celebrated a Mass of Reparation for the victims of sexual abuse. We are grateful that you took the time to pray with us and we appreciated seeing many other priests concelebrating with you. We listened to your words and we are committed to working diligently with our clergy and leadership to do what it takes to rid the Church of this evil of abuse and cover up – moving to a culture of zero-tolerance for any abuse of power or position.

Second and just as importantly, we would like to tell you that we are blessed with the leadership of Fr. John Gerrits. He is an example of a humble and holy priest who is willing to lead by example and also listen carefully to the voices of the faithful. Given the particular history of our parish, we are fortunate to have such a terrific pastor to lead us when the going gets tough. Thank you for supporting him as he supports us.

Third, we would like share with you two action steps we have taken. The Pastoral Council charged a Task Force to study the problem of sexual abuse and the response of the Church hierarchy. The Task Force has compiled a list of a dozen recommendations, covering suggestions for our parish, the Diocese and the greater Church. Attached is the complete list of action steps which we respectfully request you review and consider acting upon. We would like to highlight two in particular:

Recommendation 3d: Request the Diocese publish on their website the results of any audit regarding compliance with the 2002 Charter and maintain on the website a list of any currently serving priests, deacons, or bishops, who are under any kind of restricted ministry from our Diocese.

Recommendation 3e: Request that Bishop Powers endorse and support the USCCB's Administrative Committee's Statement on Sexual Abuse (dated September 19, 2018) and its recommendations regarding bishop accountability at the November biannual meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

These two recommendations go to the heart of the matter – steps which can be taken to ensure Bishops no longer shuffle around credibly accused abusers and that any Bishop who does not discharge the duties of his office in properly handling a complaint of abuse is held accountable.

We believe all of the outlined steps are concrete, achievable and will be critical in helping prevent sexual abuse or cover-up of clergy misconduct in the future. All of us in the laity and clergy must work toward the goal of no more future victims; even one more abused child or adult is too many. We hope you will find these recommendations helpful and take appropriate steps for follow up and action.

In addition to the work of the Task Force, the Pastoral Council held an open listening session in early November to hear what any interested persons wanted to say regarding this issue. The goal of the listening session was to make a public forum available for anyone to talk about abuse, cover-up, leadership, and provide any recommendations regarding improvements moving forward. We were very impressed with the sincerity of the comments, the care and concern expressed for victims, the gratitude for the majority priests who are faithful to their vows, and the bravery of the speakers to suggest needed change in our Church. Not everyone agreed on the root causes for this multifaceted problem or what changes are necessary. But all agreed our Church is in crisis mode and we are crying out for real change. Attached is a summary of the listening session; we respectfully submit the summary as part of our duty as laity to communicate our concerns and feelings to our Bishop as you grapple with this problem.

We are aware that you will be participating in the USCCB General Assembly shortly and therefore we have taken the time to share with you in writing these concerns and recommendations with the hope they will assist you in your duties. We request that after you have had the opportunity to reflect on this letter and the USCCB General Assembly, you will share with us and the wider Diocese your response and any actions to be taken by your office and the USCCB.

Thank you for taking the time to be with us in Hudson and to now consider the concerns raised in this letter. We will continue to pray for you, our Diocese and the entire Catholic Church.

Sincerely,

The Saint Patrick Parish Pastoral Council



## SAINT PATRICK PARISH

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF HUDSON, WISCONSIN

### **Task Force Recommendations Relating to Abuse in the Catholic Church**

#### **Saint Patrick Parish**

1. Operations relating to our parish
  - a. Regularly include the message that people should report abuse to law enforcement when we publish the Diocesan message encouraging people to report all instances of abuse by someone associated with the Church
  - b. Review and improve parish/ diocesan guidelines regarding social media communications with minors
  - c. Review policies regarding extended trips with our youth groups and make sure chaperones are well versed about the policies
  - d. Establish training for older teens who work with younger youth
  - e. Require adult volunteers who work with minors and vulnerable people to watch new Diocesan Safe Environment training videos
  - f. Create a positive theme for 2019 for our parish (to be rolled out with all ministries) that assists us in keeping focused on Christ throughout the crisis.
2. Locally addressing the issue
  - a. Bulletin article- completed
  - b. Newspaper article- Pastor's Viewpoint- completed
  - c. Website spot linking resources for information regarding the issue of abuse
  - d. Create a brochure to help people respond when people ask why they should remain in the Church
  - e. Host a listening session, where we will summarize input and forward to Bishop Powers- completed
  - f. Host a Mass of forgiveness, reparation, and healing with Bishop Powers-completed
3. Encouraging a response by the broader Church (specifically the Diocese of Superior)
  - a. Encourage the writing of letters to the Bishop calling for change and transparency- completed
  - b. Encourage the Diocese to implement recommendations 1a-e, above, for all parishes.
  - c. Request the Diocese to modify the Vocation Prayer to address the role of the laity as a vocation of service to the Church
  - d. Request the Diocese publish on their website the results of any audit on compliance with the 2002 Charter and maintain on the website a list of any currently serving priests, deacons, or bishops, who are under any kind of restricted ministry from our Diocese.
  - e. Request that Bishop Powers support the USCCB's Administrative Committee's Statement on Sexual Abuse (dated September 19, 2018) and its recommendations regarding bishop

accountability at the November biannual meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

- f. Request that Bishop Powers support the recommended changes to the 2002 Charter, advanced by the National Review Board in regards to Bishops' accountability, transparency and compliance.
- g. Request the Diocese share all relevant background check findings with the pastor consistent with our letter sent in 2017.



## SAINT PATRICK PARISH

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF HUDSON, WISCONSIN

Task Force Relating to Abuse in the Catholic Church

Sunday, 4 November 2018

### Listening Session Summary Notes

#### I) Introduction

On Sunday, November 4, 2018 the St. Patrick Church Pastoral Council sponsored a listening session in an effort to hear directly from the congregation their experiences, opinions and thoughts pertaining to the issue of abuse within the Catholic Church. The Listening Session was facilitated by a moderator and at the end of the Listening Session, participants were asked to write any additional comments that they may have. This summary provides the context of the discussion:

- ✓ **Speaker #1:** The first member who addressed the group addressed the issue of clericalism and related problems with a “top-down” approach within the Catholic Church. The speaker recommended a plan to “even the playing field” and remove the bureaucratic top-down hierarchy and church members would be more likely to discuss their issues with the Church and any complaints would have a better chance of being addressed;
- ✓ **Speaker #2:** The second speaker shared with the group that she had a background and history in Catholic education (she was a former principal at a Catholic school). She indicated that when she tried to intervene in what she perceived as “inappropriate behavior” (i.e., priest of the school inviting boys to play cards at the rectory and missing class), she was terminated and there was no due process. She indicated that the Catholic Church should develop programs for individuals who suspect inappropriate behaviors in the Church (i.e., “Virtus”) and she also recommended that Catholic priests need to assume a more humble approach (i.e., less arrogant) in their interactions with the laity;
- ✓ Several speakers also questioned the training and educational process among the Seminarians: What kind of training are they now subjected to in light of the abuse scandals?;
- ✓ Several other speakers expressed frustration also in what they perceived as a “cover up” by the Catholic Church. They indicated that the abuse scandals are bad enough, but the extent of the efforts to “cover up” the abuse over the last 40 to 50 years has been reprehensible;
- ✓ **Speaker #7** indicated that the only way to get “results in the Catholic Church . . . are to rely on legal (i.e., “suing”) action.”
- ✓ **Speaker #8** (Patrick) shared with the group that he had been a Catholic for “81 years and based on my experiences in the banking industry . . . anytime there was inappropriate behaviors (i.e., in the bathroom), they were fired. I think the Church needs to kick them (i.e., abusive priests) out . . . there is a distinction between ‘God’s Law’ and ‘Church Law’ and we should allow the priests to marry.”;

- ✓ **Speaker #9** (Tom Kroll): One of the primary issues in the Church is confusion . . . the peak of abuse in the Church occurred between 1955 and 1985 [shares handout] . . . The Church needs to be held more accountable for its actions and develop ‘stakeholders’ similar to a business model.”;
- ✓ **Speaker #10 (Greg)**: “Are abuse scandals similar in the Protestant Church where priests can marry? [implying that allowing marriage among priests within the Catholic Church may reduce pedophilia].”
- ✓ **Speaker #11 (same as speaker #1)**: “The Church is growing in the direction of allowing homosexuality to occur . . . what are we going to do with ‘runaway’ homosexuality?”;  
Fr. John responds by indicating that any type of sex among Seminarians violates Church dogma and is grounds for dismissal;  
**From the Audience**: The Church cover up exists because now the offenders from 20, 30 years ago are in higher positions . . . Cardinals or Bishops;
- ✓ **Speaker #15** (young woman in the audience): “We’ve talked about people who have been impacted and hurt by pedophiles . . . My question is: If there is anything that has been done to apologize to the victims of the Church? Has an apology been issued and what can be done?”
- ✓ **Speaker #16** (Fr. Gene): “The Pennsylvania thing really bothered me . . . lots of emotion and people talked about things that [in my parish] where never discussed before. We are dealing with the *Catholic Faith* and the *Catholic Church*. The Catholic Church is imperfect . . . and change comes from the ‘bottom – up’ process. We also need to address the problem of clericalism in the Church. I do apologize to you . . . you are the victims.”;
- ✓ **Speaker #17** (Nancy): “I think a mandatory meeting about grooming is necessary . . . Parents need to know how abusive priests gain the trust of both children and their families.”
- ✓ **Speaker #18** (Barbara): “I have a friend who lives in central Wisconsin and her husband was abused . . . she keeps sending me cards on this issue but I don’t know what to say. What can we tell them?”  
**[Fr. John in response to Speaker #18]**: “Showing a presence and prayer are helpful . . . spiritual counseling also can help.”

## II) Notes Provided by Participants

At the conclusion of the Listening Session Fr. John asked participants to share their thoughts on paper. There were three (3) notes written:

**Note #1**: “Utilize the Church Bulletin Website, and signs in the Church to encourage people to report abuse . . . they should report abuse to law enforcement.”

**Note #2**: “There’s so much misunderstanding regarding this incident among celibate people . . . the rate of pedophilia vs. and the general ‘married public.’ May I suggest presenting some comparison statistics of pedophilia in other occupations, such as coaches, teachers, etc.”; and

**Note #3**: “Rumor of the ultimate cover-up. How much did John Paul II know about clerical abuse? Was his elevation to sainthood done so quickly to stop any investigation into what he knew? Can a saint be uncanonized if it is ever discovered that he covered up cases of abuse?”

## III) Summary and Conclusions

1. **Clericalism.** After reviewing the comments and suggestions provided to the Parish Council, it seems several themes emerge. The first consistent theme addresses the issue of clericalism. For a vast majority of congregants, they were raised in the Church during an era where authoritarian rule and absolute conformity was required regarding Catholic Dogma. Encouraging the congregants and parish that if they “see something . . . then say something” regarding suspicious behaviors within the Church. Reports should be made directly to law enforcement authorities;
2. **Greater Transparency within the Church.** A second recurring theme of the Listening Session is the need for greater transparency -- the Church needs to provide members with more information how they can organize and address the problems of the Church regarding abuse scandals and not rely on being told what to do. This means more proactive responses from organized Church groups, such as the Parish Council, CCW, etc.;
3. **Change Must Come from the Bottom-up, not Top-Down:** Several participants also indicated that one reason why effective change has not developed regarding the abuse scandal is that we cannot expect those in power to address the problem. As Fr. Gene indicated, effective change comes from an organized, collaborative effort that first needs to address Clericalism;
4. **Celibacy in the Church.** Several members addressed the role of the vow of celibacy and perhaps that this is a contributing factor to abuse. Several suggestions included allowing priests to marry.