



Humility before God, Gentleness toward Neighbor

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October 30, 2018

Your Eminence,

This letter and accompanying petition come to you from the parishioners of Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church in Vienna, Virginia. Since the release of the Grand Jury Report from Pennsylvania, we have held prayer services and group meetings to discuss our community's reaction to the report and to look for a course of action we might undertake. The first meeting took place on August 28, 2018. At this meeting, more than one hundred fifty parishioners gathered to share their thoughts and feelings about the report. Like so many other communities, the reactions were concern for the victims, outrage at the actions by the offenders and even more anger at the bishops who failed to exercise leadership and care of the young people entrusted to their pastoral care. The loss of trust, the lack of transparency and the choice to "protect" the Church instead of protecting our children have caused much pain and anger. Many have decided to stop coming to church, to stop volunteering, or to stop giving to the collection until there is some real and substantial change.

On September 24th, we gathered for a second community meeting. There were over one hundred members of the community present, some of whom were not present for the first meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to move from anger and frustration to searching for concrete actions we could take to be part of the healing solution to the current situation. The gathered community helped to draft this attached petition for the bishops' consideration at your annual November meeting. The petition reflects the call for change which exists in our community. It is a call for transparency, accountability, the need for more significant lay leadership, and above all, stronger safeguards to assure the protection of the Church's members, especially her children.

The petition is drafted by very faithful Catholics who are hurt, betrayed but are staying at Our Lady of Good Counsel because of their love of God and their need to support their fellow parishioners. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and our petition. We implore you to please take significant, tangible action this November and make substantial changes to ensure the safety of our young people, and provide for a system of more transparency and a more significant inclusion of our laity in the leadership of our Church.

Sincerely in Christ,

The Parishioners of Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church

CC:

Most Reverend Christophe Pierre
Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge
Most Reverend José H. Gomez, .
Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr.
Most Reverend Gregory M. Aymond.
Most Reverend Robert P. Deeley, JCD

Most Reverend Timothy L. Doherty
Monsignor J. Brian Bransfield, S.T.D
Reverend Monsignor Jeffrey D. Burrill, S.T.L.
Ms. Linda D. Hunt, M.S.
Mr. Anthony R. Picarello, Jr., Esq
Rev. Lewis R. Fiorelli, OSFS

We need to share with you that sexual abuse by Catholic clergy scandal is on the mind of every Catholic and many non-Catholics. It is a critical matter to the life or death of the Church. We the concerned laity are trying to save the Church. We would like to call this not a petition, but a call for reform. Those of us who have met, discussed, planned, and signed this petition are here to help save our Church and be part of the solution. We are allies, not enemies.

Transparency:

1. We believe the Catholic hierarchy has not learned the lessons from Boston in 2002 and Philadelphia in 2005. The cloud of secrecy remains. We are tired of the silence and inaction. There should be consequences, including removal from public ministry, and you cannot wait for resignations. The bishops should publicly recommit to lives in service to the People of God. The Pope is the representative of Jesus on earth. Jesus has entrusted him to be the voice of the voiceless. Jesus is calling you to be His voice in the world today. We need to hear clearly and loudly how you are going to protect our children and the faithful of our Church.
2. We deserve good and faithful shepherds who are striving for holiness. Any bishop/cardinal who has had a hand in the cover up has failed to properly fulfill his ministry as bishop, especially with regard to human sexuality. The bishops/cardinals need to do a complete examination of conscience and come clean about what they have done and failed to do. If they have had a hand in this crisis, either as sexual abuser or negligent management, they need to resign.
3. We ask that the bishops and cardinals reach out to Archbishop McCarrick and encourage him to come forward, admit his wrongdoing, repent, and ask forgiveness of those he has abused. He should lead by being the example of how an offender can demonstrate his desire for transparency and supplication for forgiveness. We need to know the true story of who knew what and when. We find it shameful that Archbishop McCarrick was allowed to stay so long and move about so freely. If bishops and cardinals will not tell us the whole story, how can we have any confidence that they will deal with similar problems in the future? Without transparency, there is no accountability among our bishops. We want the Catholic Church to be the example on how to address this issue starting today. The bishops' tone and responsibility need to demonstrate a better understanding of this problem.
4. We believe the Church should provide current, regularly updated information on investigations, special reports, and the results of convictions in easily accessible formats. Currently, those seeking information must rely on what is found through piecemeal web searches, often buried many links deep. Only those with free time, significant education, and internet sophistication can find anything close to a comprehensive account of the current state of affairs regarding clerical sexual abuse. The Church needs to over-communicate regarding this critical issue. It needs to be the source of reliable information for the faithful worldwide, in a non-defensive and pastoral manner, if it wishes to have any credibility going forward.
5. The Church should encourage and facilitate victims coming forward to civil authorities. The Church must from the outset identify alleged abusers to civil authorities. Investigations external to the Church need to be conducted, and appropriate actions taken by law enforcement based on the results of the investigation. The Church has an obligation to partner with law enforcement in addressing these problems, not an adversary. This will assist in healing individuals and the community, provide information about abusers still active in ministry, and signal that future

abusive and harassing behaviors will not be tolerated. The bishops are urged to commit to an end of non-disclosure agreements when settlements are reached in civil litigation.

6. We believe the bishops have lost their moral authority on matters regarding sexuality. This is a call to action. There needs to be better and more involved lessons in Christian chastity for students so that they can protect themselves. Sexual harassment or assault of individuals over the age of consent should not be dismissed because individuals involved were of legal age. Power imbalances are at the root of this criminal behavior, and it should not be viewed as consensual.

Trust:

1. Trust in the leaders of the Church is shaken especially because of the lack of truthfulness. We need to trust that those who report abuse or harassment by Church employees will be heard. This means the Church must commit to open its records, encourage victims to come forward, humbly confess its sins in detail to the laity around the world, and support those priests and religious who report the crimes of their fellow clerics, instead of discouraging them from speaking up - either actively through stymieing someone's career or passively through valuing obedience or rank over pastoral care.
2. It will take years to re-establish this trust. We need leaders to be more interactive with congregations. Statements from leaders need to be complete and easily understood and not presented in legalese. For us to start trusting again, we need changes in reporting and accountability not just for priests, but for bishops and cardinals, with much more lay involvement in Church administration at all levels.

Laity:

In the Church, there is a diversity of ministry, but a oneness of mission. Christ conferred on the Apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and serving in His name and power. But the laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world. In the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity Apostolicam Actuositatem*, issued by Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965, he says "...the Church could scarcely exist and function without the activity of the laity."

1. We assert that the laity is defined as the baptized faithful, men and women, not living in the clerical or religious state, of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds and every walk of life. There must be a rightful recognition that the dignity of the laity and its leadership role along with ordained and religious life.
2. We call for the recognition of the rightful place of the laity, both male and female, in roles of responsibility - including decision-making.
3. We seek the rightful role of the laity to have a seat at the table, putting an end to an all-male hierarchy.
4. We call for recognizing and embracing the distinct knowledge that women bring to the Church.

5. We strongly suggest the laity be genuinely involved in the dialogue and discussion of the current crisis. The laity need to be heard, involved, and part of establishing trust and a process of transparency. This dialogue/discussion between diocesan leadership and the laity, must be two-way, not just broadcasted from clergy to the laity. If we are the Church (the Body of Christ), we, the laity, must be able to take our part in directing and assisting in her healing.
6. We call for a greater voice in the selection on bishops, pastors, and those chosen as seminarians.
7. We seek the establishment of laity-run audits, vetting processes, and other institutionalized formats through which laypeople's voices can be heard and given proper weight in Church decision-making, consistent with the practices of the early Church.

Seminarian Formation:

1. Include updated formation for seminarians with regard to human sexuality and marriage. Laypeople need to be involved in seminary training. Open, frank, and respectful discussions of human sexuality must be considered a part of the training of an emotionally mature priest.
2. Psychological and emotional screening for anyone considering the priesthood should happen during discernment. Review how seminarians are educated about celibacy and the demands of celibacy.
3. Seminaries should have training on sexual abuse prevention and include a process for how seminarians can report abuse. Priests and seminarians should feel empowered to use state and national hotlines to report abuse, or there should be a lay review board where priests could go to.

Financial Disclosure:

1. The financial records of dioceses need to be open. We need to know that our contributions are being used to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and to help the poor and needy, not to pay for the criminal and bad behavior of priests and bishops. Victims should be helped, especially with counseling, and priests and bishops should be held personally accountable.
2. The Church must provide complete regular, easily comprehensible, and complete reports of its expenditures, especially in regard to payouts of abuse claims, with the perpetrators named therein. An independent, audited, and managed financial plan to meet obligations to victims, needs to be created so that meeting those obligations is not done at the expense of parochial, diocesan, and larger Church good works and mission areas. The laity deserve to know where their monies are being spent, and who is causing them to have to pay large legal judgments or settlements. Failure to inform parishioners could lead many to cease giving.

St. Frances de Sales exhorts us to "Vive Jesu" – Live Jesus, and we do not believe that has been done well and as St. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians, we are one body, this body of Christ, the Church. When one member suffers, we all do.