

AUGUST 19, 2018

***Archbishop (no longer Cardinal) McCarrick**

Pope Francis asked for and accepted the resignation of Archbishop McCarrick from the College of Cardinals, due to the credible allegations of abuse against him from former seminarians, including at least one who was a minor at the time. Archbishop McCarrick was a priest from New York City, then a bishop in Metuchen, then Archbishop of Newark and finally Archbishop of Washington, D.C. In that latter role he was appointed by Pope John Paul II to the College of Cardinals and participated in the conclave which elected Pope Benedict XVI as pope. He was past the age of voting and so did not participate in the election of Pope Francis.

Why bring up his name here in our area? For one thing, his story is a reminder of how power gets abused when people try to hide the misdeeds of the one in power or cover up for their misdeeds. Secondly, his story is a reminder that abuse can occur at all levels, low and high. Thirdly, the whole reality of priests who have abused minors has come into the news again with the release of a grand jury report in Pennsylvania and several other dioceses finally releasing the names of all the priests who have been credibly accused of abuse. Please note: the Archdiocese of Detroit was one of the first to make public all such names. It can be found on the aod.org website under the homepage tab "Our Archdiocese" then "Newsroom" then "Clergy Accused of Abuse." Fourthly, Archbishop Vigneron issued a very lengthy letter this week to the priests and lay leaders of the diocese, addressing these issues. In the letter he focuses on the grave sins involved in the abuse and then uses it as a call to priests to live chaste celibate lives. I suppose that is fine, as far as it goes. Unfortunately, he never emphasizes how such abuse is not primarily a matter of sin and repentance, but is a crime that destroys people. For too long priests and others would repent and go to confession, but then repeat their behavior. It is not enough to frame the question in spiritual terms. True repentance means a willingness to answer for the crimes both in criminal and civil court, not simply coming to terms with personal sin. It is a matter of justice and reparation, not simply personal conversion.

Finally, the news stories on these scandals in the Church is an appropriate time to once again encourage anyone who has experienced abuse at the hands of a priest, deacon, bishop, male or female religious, or any employee of the Church to report it. Report it to the civil authorities and report it to the Archdiocese. There is a step by step process you can follow at aod.org/ReportAbuse.

AUGUST 26, 2018

SOME FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON PRIESTS ABUSE OF MINORS

I wrote a short reflection in last week's bulletin and used much of last Sunday's homily time to address some of the horror that continues to linger in the Church due to the abuse of minors by priests and other Church leaders, and the cover up that many dioceses engaged in, even after the abuse scandal broke into the open. I do not want to belabor these issues, but at the same time I think it is important to address some specific questions that people have asked me. Also, please see the links that have been put up on the website. Go to "What's Happening" and click on "Issues related to the Abuse of Minors" and follow the links there. They include the Pope's letter, Archbishop Vigneron's letter, and more.

What does the Church as an institution not understand about addressing these issues? It is very clear that the Church's leadership was way too slow in addressing abuse issues and too concerned about its public reputation and/or lawsuits connected to abuse. It treated these crimes as a small family would—usually not reporting it to the authorities, keeping things quiet, etc. The problem, of course, is that silence does not protect future victims. And worse, the Church authorities often transferred the abuser to a new situation, which simply allowed for that abuse to continue in many cases. In the past (pre-2000) there truly was a lack of appreciation for the gravity and consequences of handling abuse cases in this way, not just in the Church but in all institutions. Now or in the future there is no excuse for such negligence, and dioceses that continue to be less than fully forthcoming with all evidence and reports need to be held accountable.

Here in the Archdiocese of Detroit—up until the cover came off the lid in Boston in 2002 and then cascaded throughout the United States, leading to all the bishops putting together the Charter for the Protection of Minors--

we tended to follow that pattern of keeping allegations quiet, putting the priest through some type of treatment program, offering counseling and sometimes small settlement monies to the victims, then allowing the priest to be back into public ministry in a new situation. This was not a good or just or healthy practice, but it was the way things were done in nearly every institution, not just the Church. Since 2002, however, the Archdiocese of Detroit has been very assertive and public in handling allegations of abuse. All allegations are reported to the civil authorities so that they can investigate and, if it is warranted, bring criminal charges. Independently, the Archdiocese does its own investigation and the findings are reviewed by a board composed of nearly all lay people. Regardless of whether the civil authorities criminally indict or not, if the board finds the allegation to be credible, then the priest is publicly named, removed from his assignment, forbidden to present himself in public or to act in public as a priest, informed of the situation and told to get both a criminal and canonical lawyer, and pretty much left on his own to fight or refute or accept the allegation. You can find a list of those priests on the archdiocesan website.

So, has the Church learned from its past mistakes? In many cases, yes. In some dioceses and countries, no. But it will, because there is no way of truly stopping all of it becoming public. But one area the Church still struggles to come to terms with—and I think it will happen but it will take many years—is the way the hierarchical and clerical lifestyle forms the heart of the Church as an institution. I am not advocating an end to ordination or to structuring the Church with bishops as heads of dioceses and priests as heads of parishes. Nor am I touching here on the issue of ordaining more married men or even women. Rather, it seems to me in reading the reports about Pennsylvania, Boston, and elsewhere that it has been unhealthy to have priests, formed in the same seminary systems, take on all the positions of authority and power within the institution. One cannot prove a hypothetical, but I have a very difficult time believing that the abuse would have been as extensive and as covered up as it was, if we had more women and lay men in positions of true authority. In other words, if these horrendous revelations do not lead to some visible, structural changes, then the Church will fail, it seems to me, to heed the “signs of the times” and will lose an opportunity of grace-filled reform.

Why should I contribute to the Church, if all the monies are vulnerable to being used to settle lawsuits related to abuse? Or that question can be extended to why be involved in any way with such an institution. The only answer I can give is that, despite its obvious failings and flaws, the overwhelming reality of the Church, both in terms of its work and its people—including the vast majority of priests and bishops—is good. Not perfect, but good: working not to simply perpetuate the institution as institution, but for the kingdom of God to have a better hold within the world, willing to dedicate their whole life and all energy to making real Jesus’ invitation to be transformed by the good news. I can understand why someone might use these revelations of abuse to justify not being involved with or have anything to do with the Church, but I also know that, for those who are active in the Church, the good so far outweighs the bad, that it is not hard to remain both a believer and an active member.

If you are interested in how much the Archdiocese of Detroit has spent on settlements related to allegations of abuse over the past 65 years (about \$4.5 million), I have added a link to a document that lists the various payouts as of a year ago. Also note that no direct donations—not those to the parish, nor those to the Catholic Services Appeal, or even the parish’s taxed contribution to the Archdiocese—go to pay for such settlements. The archdiocese relied on insurance monies and then on a self-insurance pool of money that came from investment surpluses. When that self-insurance grew sufficiently, all original investment money was returned to the Archdiocese. Any settlements, including monies for ongoing counseling, come from that fund only. Finally, please note that the Archdiocese does not require or promote non-disclosure clauses in any settlement, but it will honor one, if the person who was victimized requests it.

The Church, and St. Regis Parish in particular, needs your continuing support. Is it worthy of that support and trust? Overall, I think yes. In particular for this parish, absolutely yes. The local parish can make an amazing difference in people’s lives by forming a community of active, joyful faith. It does not negate the mistakes made on a larger institutional level, and we are not perfect, but the parish can lessen the reality of the Church as uncaring or out of touch with reality. In terms of monies, we account for all donations and are open to any questions about how monies are spent. The Finance Council reviews every month’s bank reconciliation and sees every expense item. We have nothing to hide, and we welcome your scrutiny.

SEPTEMBER 2, 2018

MARCH 3, 2019

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND ABUSE OF MINORS: THE CURRENT PICTURE

Last week Pope Francis brought together the heads of all the various national/regional conferences of bishops and the major superiors of the largest priest religious orders to do four things:

1. Listen to stories of the harm that clergy abuse and cover up of such abuse cause from those who experienced being preyed upon.
2. Make it abundantly clear that there is no place in priesthood for those who would harm vulnerable people. The Pope issued a very clear statement, and prior to the summit, begged all priests and bishops who have abused the vulnerable, if they truly value the gift of priesthood, to trust in the mercy of God, but to turn themselves in to civil authorities and face the consequences for their actions.
3. Come to a united understanding, no matter the differences in civil laws around the world, that all credible allegations of abuse must be given immediately to civil authorities, even if the Church itself will conduct its own further investigations.
4. Ask for wisdom on what offices/processes need to be in place in order to hold bishops accountable for both reporting abuse and investigating a bishop if he is accused of abuse himself. This is the one that is most likely to disappoint, because people want immediate action, and this is likely to take some time.

As this summit was happening, Michigan's Attorney General released an update on the ongoing investigation of the seven Catholic dioceses in Michigan. If you recall, they obtained warrants for all materials, written or electronic, that each diocese keeps on file regarding clergy behavior, allegations against any clergy, actions taken, and so on—files that go back seventy years. All the dioceses and their officials cooperated willingly. There was no attempt to hide anything or delay any investigation. The Attorney General had very little to say on any specific cases, indicating that the volume of material seized in the warrants will take a number of months to comb through and properly assess. At the same time she reminded people that there is a hotline to call if someone wants to report any current or past incident of abuse (844-324-3374 or online at www.michigan.gov/clergyabuse). She criticized the use of non-disclosure agreements by the Church, encouraged the dioceses to set up a victims' fund that the Attorney General would administer, and she also suggested that no one should trust the dioceses with such information, but go directly to the civil authorities.

At that press conference, there seemed to be some misunderstanding on the part of the Attorney General that the Church in the United States has implemented strict reporting procedures after the 2002 public blow up of the whole issue (these procedures go by the name "Dallas Charter"), and the dioceses in Michigan have all complied with these norms. As a result, the Archdiocese of Detroit issued the following statement:

The Archdiocese of Detroit appreciates the Attorney General's Office for providing an update today regarding its investigation. We also would like to add a few points of clarification.

- *Since 2002, the Archdiocese of Detroit has not entered into any non-disclosure agreements, unless specifically requested by a survivor of abuse, as required by the Catholic Church in the United States. In addition, the Archdiocese does not enforce any non-disclosure agreements signed prior to 2002. We encourage all abuse survivors to share their stories.*
- *The Archdiocese of Detroit does not self-police. We encourage all victims to report abuse directly to law enforcement. When we learn of an allegation of sexual abuse of minors, we immediately notify law enforcement authorities, in accordance with the agreements we have had in place with them since 2002, when we shared past case files involving clergy misconduct and committed to turning over all new allegations regardless of when the alleged abuse occurred. We then follow law enforcement's lead to step aside and assist, when requested, during any criminal investigation.*
- *The Archdiocese of Detroit has not been asked by the Attorney General's Office to stop its internal review process. These internal investigations are required under Church law, and their purpose is to restrict or remove from ministry anyone who has committed sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult. The Archdiocese of Detroit places no deadlines or time limits on those who wish to report the sexual abuse of minors by priests, deacons and other personnel. Be it five, 15, or 50 years later, our diocese accepts and responds to all reports – and immediately shares them with law enforcement.*
- *Clergy with credible accusations against them do not belong in ministry. Since the Attorney General's investigation*

began, the Archdiocese of Detroit has not received notification from that office regarding credible accusations against any of our priests. Should we become aware of such a complaint, we will act immediately.

- *The State of Michigan's mandated reporting laws have been in place for decades. Through the years, we have strongly supported expansions to the list, including the addition of clergy. The Archdiocese of Detroit regularly educates all mandated reporters of their duties to report sexual abuse or neglect of minors.*
- *When the Archdiocese of Detroit became aware of the Attorney General's request for parishes to publicize the state's tip-line, we immediately offered to help our parishes facilitate the publication of that material.*
- *The Archdiocese of Detroit looks forward to working with the Attorney General's Office to clarify some of the broad generalizations made during today's press conference.*
- *The Archdiocese of Detroit offers continued prayers and sorrow for all victim-survivors and their families. One sinful, criminal act, especially against God's most vulnerable and trusting children, is unacceptable and one suffering soul too many. We remain committed to preventing sexual abuse against anyone - especially children and vulnerable adults.*
- *For additional information about how the Archdiocese of Detroit works to prevent and respond to sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults, please visit protect.aod.org.*

What are we to do with all this news and focus on the Catholic Church and clergy abuse? One cardinal (McCarrick) has been recently defrocked. As I write this, a criminally guilty verdict for another cardinal (Pell, in Australia) has been publicized. Over the next few weeks I would like to highlight a few points, to try to help those who find themselves in discussion with others, Catholics and non-Catholics. In doing this I recognize that we priests and others in institutional power have lost most of our credibility on these issues. At the same time, I find that many news reports fail to put events they are discussing into a proper historical context, and often lump together vastly different issues simply because they involved priests who violated their vow/promise of celibacy. More next time.

MARCH 10, 2019

*** THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND ABUSE OF MINORS: THE CURRENT PICTURE (CONTINUED)**

I began a series of articles in last week's bulletin. My goal is to offer my own take on the current reality of the Church's handling of clergy abuse. One of my concerns is that some news reports seem to conflate how it was done some years ago and how it is done now. It is horrendous that up until 2002 the Church was not aggressive enough in removing abusers from ministry, covering up that abuse in many cases, and even moving people to a new setting without telling people about the past abuse. It is important to know that this is not the case now or for the last sixteen plus years, at least in the Archdiocese of Detroit. Here is what happens in the Archdiocese of Detroit if someone accuses a priest, deacon, bishop or lay Church minister of abuse of a minor, whether it is a recent claim or goes back decades.

The Church encourages anyone who has been abused or has knowledge of abuse to report it as soon as possible. This is true no matter when the abuse took place, even if the person being accused of abuse is no longer in ministry or is deceased. The Attorney General of Michigan has set up a hotline (1.844.324.3374) to receive all such calls. The Archdiocese of Detroit has its own hotline (1.866.343.8055) and can be notified as well. If the person calling has not notified civil authorities, the Archdiocese will. No one will be discouraged from notifying authorities.

The diocese has no say over or influence on any civil investigation. In fact, church records will most likely be subpoenaed as part of the investigation, and the diocese cooperates fully with anything that will help the investigation. On the diocese's side of things, there will be an investigation as well, not by the bishop, but by a board appointed by him and given the freedom to make their own judgment. The standard of judgment used by the diocese is not whether the accusation can be proved (that is the job of civil authorities), but whether the accusation has credibility to it. Any accusation made public means the end of the public ministry of that priest or other minister, and so it is not just enough to accuse someone. On the other hand, the standard used has to be supportive of the claim of the one who believes they have

suffered abuse. So, on the diocesan side of things, there is a discussion with the person who was victimized and, if the accusation is found credible (the person seems to be sincere in what they are saying and details of the allegation have a possibility to have occurred), then the diocese removes the person from public ministry and the position in which they currently serve. The accused will be named, listed on the diocesan website, and the public invited to go to authorities with any other information they might have on the person. In short, that person's ministry is effectively finished, even if the allegation does not lead to a criminal trial or civil lawsuit.

The diocese will continue to pay the accused their salary and benefits that are their due, but the diocese does not provide them help with a lawyer or any defense. They must do that on their own. For the one who has lodged the abuse complaint, the diocese will offer help with counseling and other reasonable help that can be agreed upon between the person and the diocese. The goal through it all—now, though unfortunately not necessarily prior to 2002—is for justice to be achieved as much as possible; those victimized by church workers to be believed and given resources for their healing; zero tolerance for any abuser to remain in public ministry; and transparency about the whole process. Next time, some thoughts on where I think the Church could still do better.

MARCH 17, 2019

*** THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND ABUSE OF MINORS: THE CURRENT PICTURE (continued)**

Please see the March 3 and March 10 articles for some previous comments. As mentioned, in the Archdiocese of Detroit, since 2002, the Catholic Church of the archdiocese has committed to passing on all allegations against priests or other Church personnel to civil authorities. If an allegation is deemed credible (not that it has been proved but only that the witness appears truthful and the details alleged have a possibility of having taken place), the Archdiocese removes the person from public ministry and publishes his/her name in the papers and on its website. The person's public ministry is effectively ended, even if the allegation is unable to be proven in a court of law. In other words, the Church in the Archdiocese has flipped the equation. It tries to help the one who believes they have experienced abuse rather than trying to protect the accused priest or Church worker. No more hiding the names, getting treatment in secret and then re-assigning a person elsewhere, or other practices of the past. This is a positive change, even though it puts all priests and church personnel in a very vulnerable position.

Where can we still do better? On a global scale, there continue to be a number of bishops' conferences and individual bishops and religious orders who do not seem to fully understand the gravity of these issues. It is still remarkable to me that so many dioceses and religious orders only recently published the names of credibly accused priests, in the wake of the uproar over the Pennsylvania Attorney General's report. In the United States that should have been done in the months and year after the 2002 Dallas gathering which declared a "zero tolerance" policy. There are still some who have not done so. That is unacceptable. More egregious to me has been the choice of some bishops, including some in the United States, who have allowed credibly accused priests to continue to minister publicly, even though they might have been removed from direct supervision of minors or sent to retreat houses. There is no excuse for that, and those bishops and religious superiors should voluntarily resign or be asked to resign.

The recent gathering of heads of all conferences of bishops and major superiors of religious orders in Rome was a step in getting everyone more attuned to what needs to happen. But the Catholic Church is not the monolithic reality many think it is. The Pope cannot simply assert his judgment and it will happen. Each individual bishop has apostolic authority on his own and each must embrace the same urgency for change in this area or it will fail. What needs to happen more is what the Pope finally did in Chile—ask for complete change of policy and, if needed, the voluntary resignations of all the bishops of the area.

This independence of each bishop does raise the question, however, of how to create structures which will hold bishops accountable. The U.S. Bishops are floating different proposals at their upcoming meeting. One that seems to be gaining support is to have the metropolitan bishop (the Archbishop of a region) be the point person for any bishops accused in his region of abuse himself or improper handling of abuse cases (or have the neighboring region's archbishop informed, if it is the metropolitan being accused). That might have credibility, if allegations go directly to a lay review board rather than first to the archbishop, all allegations are reported immediately to civil authorities (just as would happen if a priest were accused), the bishop steps aside from all public ministry immediately, and the public are informed of the investigation. What has been odd (and in my mind, wrong) up until now is the difference between how priests and bishops have been treated. With the priest, if it is a toss up between the credibility of the priest and someone bringing an allegation, the Church will now side with the one making the accusation. For a bishop, the Church, at least seemingly until now, continues to side with the bishop, until the accusation is not just credible but nearly certain.

The reason for this caution with bishops traditionally has to do with Catholic theology concerning bishops. Theoretically, any bishop can create a schismatic Church—a splinter of the Catholic Church where the bishop could ordain other bishops and all the sacraments are valid because the bishop shares apostolic succession with the Pope and all other validly ordained bishops. In other words, the rule was “always treat bishops with kid gloves” lest they split off and form their own Church. That is one reason why the removal of McCarrick as a cardinal, his resignation as a bishop and his defrocking as a priest was so unprecedented, even if he did not receive the civil punishment that was due his actions. Because priests on their own cannot validly ordain bishops or other priests, the Church has felt free to deal with them more severely. But there is also an issue with priests, in that, again in the Catholic understanding, “once a priest always a priest.” A priest can be “defrocked,” removed from ministry, no longer be supported by the Church, and left on their own to work out the rest of their lives, but technically he is still a priest. And the Church has a responsibility toward him and what he does, at least on a moral level. There is no way to supervise such “ex”-priests. Is it better, then, in the case of priests who have abused, to remove them from public ministry but continue to offer them some financial support and therefore exercise some supervision of them? In the Archdiocese of Detroit, in most cases, they have not requested that the abuser be defrocked, only removed from public ministry.

Another area where we need to do better as a Church is facing head on issues of sexuality and power. A priest is formed, at least in most cases at present, in a very closed, controlled environment. A seminarian goes from being someone who has very little power within the institution to someone who is put into a position of authority that carries great weight. At the same time, the seminary, although it will form a seminarian in the virtue of celibate chastity and offer pastoral support in integrating that into one's life, is not like a parish or other ministry settings. If a seminarian has not matured in understanding his own sexuality and how to accept but properly channel human desires, he can find himself dealing with these more on his own in ministry and mistakes can be made. Both in the area of power and sexuality, priests, in other words, can mess up. It is important, I think, that we recognize different types of failures and respond to them appropriately.

What cannot be tolerated is when sexuality and power, no matter how he got there, leads a priest to take advantage of a minor or someone in a vulnerable position. That use of power to assert oneself over another sexually is a type of distortion of human nature that has to be handled with zero tolerance. Even if a priest were to receive counseling and ongoing support, there is no way to verify that a priest had been healed or permanently changed. He needs to step aside from priestly and any other ministry/jobs that would put him into a position of contact with minors or other vulnerable people. The same response would be appropriate for a priest who avails himself of child pornography, even if he has never acted out on it toward a minor. In all these cases, forgiveness is possible but not restoration to the former way of life.

However, there are situations of priests who misuse their authority or who enter into inappropriate sexual relationships with other adults. There is a tendency, at least in the media and even at the institutional level, to

lump all of these together under the word “abuse,” which I do not think is helpful. If the actions are truly a form of abuse, then, yes, by all means remove him from priesthood. If the actions are mistakes and failures from which one can learn and grow, or the human process of falling in love with another mature person and working through that relationship, that is a different story. There should be a way for the Church community to help the priest through these situations, and if he shows an ability to re-commit fully to priestly ministry, a way to keep him within priestly ministry. More next time.

MARCH 24, 2019

*** The Catholic Church and Abuse of Minors: The Current Picture (continued)**

Please see the March 3, 19, and 17 articles for some previous comments on how the Archdiocese of Detroit handles any allegation of abuse and where I think the Church needs to continue to improve. The real questions are “Why stay in the Catholic Church with all this taking place? How can you support a Church that has handled the issue of abuse so poorly?” I have been asked that by friends and family, very active and committed Catholics and marginally connected Catholics, people of other faiths and no faith. I realize that I am part of the institutional side of the Church that has messed up so badly, so my words might not carry great weight. But here are my thoughts.

If we are going to condemn people and institutions for all the bad they have done, should we not commend them for all the good as well? And as contemptible as the bad is within the Church’s long history—there is no way to justify it—the good is amazing. The virtue, generosity, kindness, compassion, creativity for the good that has emerged year after year, century after century; responding to the real needs of the most vulnerable and challenging the wealthy and powerful to use their resources for the good—this is not in spite of the Church’s reality as an institution, rather because of how that institution has been able to incarnate and pass on the message and ministry of Jesus Christ. I find it odd that people will praise the life and work of a Mother Theresa or Solanus Casey or Oscar Romero but attribute that to them personally as though the Church’s theological, formational, and liturgical tradition has little or nothing to do with why they became who they were and what they did. If one were able to view the entirety of the Church at a glance (all of its people, all they are doing, all of its structures, good and bad) the good would vastly overwhelm the bad. So, why remain within the Church today? Because, in spite of its many and severe flaws, and even evil within it, it is the bearer of amazing goodness and hope, as witnessed to by the overwhelming majority of its members.

The second general response I give focuses on the loss to the Church, if good people disconnect. I always preface that remark with “*I understand why and even that people might decide to leave but... .*” Each person, even if they are highly critical of the Church’s leadership or disagree with certain Church practices and teachings, is important and necessary to the Church’s overall well-being. The last thing we need is a Church where everyone thinks alike, or everyone is simply lock-step with what the pastor or bishop says to do. It is precisely that type of loyalty to the Church as institution by many bishops and priests that has helped to create the current situation. I encourage people to remain in some connection to the Church. Ideally Sunday Eucharist. If that is too much, then prayer during adoration times or simply in the church space itself. If even that is not leaving one peaceful, then at least be part of one of the many outreaches for good that are Church-sponsored. Why remain within the Church today? Because the Church—and God’s work through the Church—needs you.

There are as well, for me, more specific reasons to remain within the Church and do all I can to see that the Church stays strong in its ability to pass on and live its faith tradition. The biggest, for me, is the Eucharist. I do not know what I would do without the Eucharist. First as a priest. It is a joy to celebrate Eucharist with a gathered community of faith. There are some, especially in my theological training, who have questioned why someone would remain a priest in a Church that allows only men to be priests and does not open itself to choosing some of the best of men (because they are married); or in a Church that refuses to invite all baptized

Christians to communion; in a Church that sets up obstacles to communion for the divorced and remarried or people not in recognized marriages. My answer to them has been the same. I agree that the Church has the ability within its structures to make significant changes as to who presides and how the liturgy is celebrated. And on some issues, I am disappointed that the Church's leadership refuses to consider them. But, I truly felt and continue to feel called to a priesthood that places the celebration of Eucharist at its center. It brings me joy, even as I experience it bringing life to so many.

However, even if I gave up being the priest-celebrant—I would so greatly miss that, but it is not essential to me as a person—I do not ever see myself giving up the Eucharist. The Catholic Church's understanding of Sunday Eucharist—a gathering of the people of God at the invitation of the risen Jesus to connect all that we are to the once-for-all offering of His life for the salvation of the world—is core to my living in Christ. It is not dependent on the holiness of any person, including the priest. It is not simply a creation of the community gathered in the Lord's name. It is not something that comes about by saying the correct words and doing the right actions. It is not merely a symbol we enact to feel good or to be faithful to the Lord's command to "Do this in memory of me." It is not even dependent on me being all that excited or attentive to what is happening (though it is best when all present are so attentive and participative). It is a participation in the saving mystery which God makes possible through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. It is real. It is visceral. It engages our whole being (if we open ourselves to it). It unites us (and demands we try to embrace that unity) to a diversity of people across all socio-economic-political-cultural strata. It is sheer gift. Why do I not leave the Church? Because of the Catholic (and by extension Orthodox) Church's celebration of Eucharist. It is a reason for me never to lose touch with the Church, even in times of great doubt and questioning.

Another reason for me to stay is the Catholic Church's embrace of what Pope John Paul II called the "Gospel of Life." The Catholic Church does not simply condemn abortion. It urges the whole Church to be a community in which a person struggling with this decision can find aid and support. Moreover, if one has made that decision, the Church has a whole ministry of healing and reconciliation it desires for the person. It does not condemn the person. That commitment to life makes the Church speak up against war, lack of health care, improper treatment of immigrants. The Church as institution stands against the use of capital punishment, the reality of assisted suicide or anything that leads to euthanasia. The Church as institution strongly advocates for those with handicaps, mental illnesses, and other challenges. In fact, in these areas, the Church as institution, trying to be faithful to the consequences of the teachings of Jesus, finds itself at odds with many of its individual members. It is the institutional reality that has been able to keep this commitment to protecting the dignity of every human life consistent and strong. That commitment, for me, is a reason to stay within the Church.

There is a joke that I am sure many have heard that goes something like this: *How do you know that the Catholic Church is part of God's plan? There is no other way to explain how such a screwed up institution could exist continuously for nearly 2000 years.* Beneath that joke is a recognition that, if you line up all the bad things the Church has been complicit with over the centuries, it is a not a pretty picture. The unveiling of clergy abuse and its cover-up, along with the light being shined on a clerical culture of misused power, becomes another damning part of that history. Beneath that joke as well, however, is an appreciation that there is something amazing about the Church's long-lived reality. To be part of the Catholic Church is to bring into our lives elements of two thousand years of various ways of responding to the message of Jesus Christ to "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.*" (Matthew 28:19-20). Those elements transcend any one language, ethnicity, culture, political or economic system, time or place. They are worth embracing, even as we need to condemn the awful things this Church has done or fails to do.

Next time: some thoughts on the underlying cause of the abuse crisis. Unfaithful priests? Sexual orientation? Something else?

MARCH 31, 2019

*** THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND ABUSE OF MINORS: THE CURRENT PICTURE (CONTINUED)**

Here are my thoughts on some of the suggested underlying causes of the abuse crisis. These are not scientific findings, rather personal thoughts.

In my conversations with people and reading many news articles and commentaries on the clergy abuse issue, I see several misguided (as I see it) ways to talk about the underlying causes and consequent remedies for the crisis. The first is to focus primarily on the issue of celibacy alone. On one side some will argue that celibacy itself is the problem and say we need to get rid of it. Statistically abuse perpetrated by adult men goes across the board. There are no universally agreed upon statistics, but the general scientific social consensus seems to be about 5% of (American) males will abuse a minor in their lifetime. That is right at the percentage of priests who have abused. It is sad that priests abuse at the same rate as the general male population, but it does mean that most abuse occurs in homes with relatives or close friends of the family. We could have an all married clergy and abuse would still happen in about the same numbers. The victims of the abuse might change (more on that later) but the numbers would most likely be similar.

On the other side of those who focus misguidedly only on celibacy are church-related people who think: if all celibates would just be true to their vows/promises, none of this would have happened. Theoretically true, perhaps. But do we really want in priesthood (or any situation with easy and encouraged access to minors) men who are sexually attracted to minors? Moreover, in some of the commentary on these issues, I have seen many make no distinctions about the many different types of sex-related failings among celibates. To put the rape of a child into the same category as a mature, adult, albeit improper sexual relationship is both wrong and unhelpful. Many who focus on celibacy alone in this way think that the answer is to kick out of priesthood any priest who violates their promise or vow of celibacy. Yet, I know a number of very good priests who struggled with celibacy, even entering into a mature, consensual adult relationship for a time, who have come to live their priestly life in deeper ways. The Church would have been the loser, if all of them had been kicked out. It does not mean that priests should not live their promises or vows. Of course, they should be doing that. It just means that total celibacy or no celibacy are not really going to address the underlying causes of the problem.

Another misguided way to frame the abuse issue is to focus on the issue of sexual orientation. In reading the comments on this issue, some would put the blame on priests who have a same sex orientation or act in a homosexual manner. On the other side are those that argue that homosexuality has nothing to do with the current abuse reality. I think both are wrong. The solution given to the problem by the first group is to not admit into and/or kick out of priesthood priests who identify as homosexuals. Again, there are many such priests, who have integrated their sexual orientation in a mature, affective but celibate way, and the Church would be the lesser to lose them or never to have them as priests. There are no statistics on what the percentage in priesthood might be. And currently there is definitely a pressure on such priests within the Church as institution not to publicly identify themselves as such. But it should not be surprising that there are many homosexually-oriented priests, bishops and cardinals. Embraced within a life of mature celibacy it is an honored and highly praised life that they would be living. I have no idea of the number. Priests do not generally reveal to each other what their sexual orientation is. But I would not be surprised if the percentage of homosexually-oriented priests is four or five times higher in priesthood than in the general male population, given that it is a way that the Church's teaching can be faithfully lived.

However, those who think that homosexuality has absolutely nothing to do with the issue of abuse by priests are also, I think, mistaken for one category of abuse, given the statistics that have been published. I will say a few words on this next time and wrap up these comments by pointing to what I think the underlying cause (and potential solution) might be.

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*** The Catholic Church and Abuse of Minors: The Current Picture (conclusion)**

Please see previous articles that have led to this point. I will collect them and put them together on the website under News-Pastor's Perspective-Archives/Series. I have been giving my two cents on underlying causes for the crisis and subsequent ways to move forward, focusing first on what I think are some misguided understandings. The final one I want to address are those who claim that homosexuality has absolutely nothing to do with the issue of abuse by priests.

It is true that serial abusers will prey on those who are available. Odd as it may sound, such abuse for them is not an expression of their sexual orientation but of their power and control. For Catholic priest abusers that often has meant that boys have been victimized, even if that does not mean the priest abuser is himself truly homosexually-oriented. And, as mentioned last week, I think those who want all homosexually-oriented priests out of priesthood, even if they are living celibate lives, are misguided and the Church's capacity and heart for ministry would be severely harmed. However, looking at the statistics from the John Jay study of the crisis, it is clear that in the Catholic Church there is a disproportionate number of cases of priests abusing teen boys, compared to the pattern of abuse in the rest of society. This does not lessen the wrongness of these actions. Absolutely criminally wrong. All such cases should carry with them full legal penalties. Such a priest should not be in the priesthood. But it seems to me that the statistics suggest a human formation problem in our seminary systems, especially in terms of integrating a mature sexuality into one's life.

Since the time of the Council of Trent in the 16th century, when our current form of seminary formation was established to deepen the intellectual and spiritual formation of candidates for priesthood, the Church has favored a model that sets the candidates apart from the rest of their peers and surrounds them with a semi-monastic schedule. This was done often from high school age on. But even if from college age on, too many candidates had to come to maturity and integration of their sexuality and human formation in that more isolated context. This environment was, moreover, nearly all-male, and so any sexual acting out was more likely to be male-male, something that carried over for some into ministry. Add to this reality the fact that such an environment is not the easiest one in which to honestly acknowledge and deal with sexuality. It is much easier to suppress, ignore, be in a "don't ask, don't tell" mindset. I do not think it is happenstance that the highest percentages of abusers have come from classes of priests trained in such closed systems, and that the most common form of priestly abuse has been with a teen male as the victim.

Some of this began to change in some places from the mid 1970s on after the Second Vatican Council. This was also the peak of the so-called "sexual revolution," and attempts at changing the formation process were haphazard at best. The good news is that there is now an awareness that priestly formation needs to include mature human formation, including formation in sexual maturity and integration of a celibate life into one's vocation. The not so good news, in my opinion, is that we have not found an adequate model of priestly formation in line with the vision of the Second Vatican Council. Instead we have fallen back on the older, semi-monastic model. This has been coupled with a decidedly negative view of homosexuality, even if one was desirous of living a celibate life. I am not sure that such a system will be optimal for encouraging priests to be both honest about and integrate their sexuality in a mature way.

What might be an alternative model in light of Vatican II? I think the Council's focus on the vocation of every baptized person and the call to holiness of everyone, no matter their walk of life, is the starting point, especially for diocesan priesthood. Rather than trying to maintain a complete (and somewhat isolated) formation process all wrapped up

in one seminary, it might be better to have a more parish-centered focus for formation. This would allow even more time for a candidate to live within a parish and be part of parish ministries and interacting with all aspects of parish life; forming spiritual and friendship bonds with men and women of all backgrounds, ages, and temperaments; appreciating the real holiness that others are striving to live; receiving their theological education always alongside other men and women who are receiving the same education. I wonder as well if the model for the future might more typically be men who are involved in various professions and have proven their maturity in such professions, but find themselves desiring something more. Life experience would already have given them a significant degree of human formation. They would know that priesthood is not just a way to avoid dealing with self-development, rather a true calling to use their gifts and personality for the good of the Church.

Because priests do need more focused formation in prayer, liturgy and other areas, I could see that happening in a more intense way, much like the current model of a novitiate year for religious men and women. But the key, I think, is to have several large, strong, well-run parishes who would see themselves as integral to the formation of future priests, including encouraging their commitment to a celibate life. Of course, such a model would also be conducive for forming men who choose to be married first and then become priests. I do wonder, probably not in the United States but elsewhere, if that is a direction that various conferences of bishops might choose to follow, breaking the automatic connection between celibacy and priesthood, and moving away from a semi-monastic model of formation.

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