

## **ON THE CURRENT SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Dear IHM Parishioners. As your Parochial Vicar here at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Parish, Father Don Malin our Pastor has asked me to share my thoughts and reflections concerning the above topic that is currently rocking the Church. I have respectfully accepted to do so and even to share some suggestions and to shed some light for our way forward as we slowly recover and heal from this current crisis in our Church.

It is ugly and messy. We are experiencing spiritual turmoil, spiritual terrorism and pastoral disaster. We have a virus, illness and a plague in the Church. We have an ecclesiastical crime and moral corruption in the Church. It is vitally important for us to address head-on *“the elephant in the room,”* that is; the current abuse crisis that is threatening the Church! There is no doubt that, the current clergy sexual abuse scandal has hit really hard both to the hierarchy of the Church and the Laity; to the Catholic Christians and the non-Catholic Christians; to believers and to non-believers. Saint Paul says, *“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all members rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor 12: 26).* The sexual abuse crisis is affecting all of us in the Church from the categories of victims, perpetrators and those who don't belong to any of these categories. The victims, perpetrators and all of us are part of the one Church and therefore, the whole Church is suffering. In short, we are now experiencing the worst crisis in the American Catholic Church's history since the 2002 Boston sexual abuse scandal. We also see this sexual abuse crisis being unveiled in other countries like Chile, Ireland, Australia, England and other parts of the world. This crisis does not only touch priests but also the bishops- (both as agents of cover-ups and also committing the sexual abuse themselves). And still worse we see and hear the bishops speaking differently in their interviews and media houses instead of speaking with one voice towards concrete and practical solutions of solving our current crisis in the Church.

During the days of the Emperor Caesar Augustus, when all roads really did lead to Rome, no roads connected the peripheral cities of the empire to one another. The reason for that was to make it more difficult for the cities to join forces and rise up in rebellion against Roman rule. Those days are over. Now we are all linked by information, superhighways, interstates, social Medias, emails, twitters, cell phones, and of course more and more advances in technology, education and more freedom that make it much more difficult for the Church hierarchies even the Bishop of Rome, to keep secrets from the faithful. The Catholic Church is currently hurting and bleeding pain. From the wake of the Ex-Cardinal McCarrick revelations to the wake of the Archbishop Vigano revelation, the Catholic Church in the United States and the whole world is experiencing some in-fighting - "*a civil war*" within itself. We also know that, in between the McCarrick and the Vigano revelations there is also the "*Pennsylvania Grand Jury report*" concerning the clergy sex abuse in six Dioceses within the State of Pennsylvania.

Out there, the society is fighting the Catholic Church but also the Catholics are fighting among themselves internally. Do we 'smell' any politics in all this scandal? Why is the Catholic Church at the center and so 'targeted' in this scandal? Is this problem found only in the Catholic Church or is it also evident in other churches? Is this a general human problem or only a problem within the Catholic Church? In the social media for example; we see bishops fighting and contradicting each other, priests fighting bishops, the laity fighting the priests and the bishops. Of course, even Pope Francis is not left out in all these fights. In all these fights we see two realities: I hear the anger, I share the shame, and I feel the pain. At the same time, I see hate and animosity in the Church. It is as if the Church is currently experiencing its own '9-11.' There is no doubt that we are in a very confusing moment in the Church.

It is also sad to point out that, most of the unveiled sex abuse scandals from McCarrick to the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report dates as far as seventy, sixty, fifty, forty, thirty and twenty years ago. These sex abuse revelations are 'jaw dropping' and have currently lacerated the Church. All this is happening and yet for the 'Body of Christ'-(the Church) to be complete, we need both "*the flocks and the shepherds*" in the Church.

In the midst of these clergy sexual scandal, most people are likely to be particularly worried about their priests and the Pope. The reason for this is that, for most people, priests are the closest and most influential spiritual leaders in their lives. The Pope on the other hand is the Vicar of Christ, successor of Peter and the visible symbol of unity in the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, in particular, the priests and the Pope are the two most influential spiritual leaders in the Catholic Church and they indeed rightly and truly 'hold the Church and her faithful together.'

Sincerely speaking, there is anger, frustration, disappointment, depression, confusion, shock, hurt, harm, pain, lack of trust in the Church authorities and wounding of our people because of this awful situation. It is very obvious that, the sins, crimes and violence committed by the Church authorities have both wounded and violated the trust of the people of God. Furthermore, this is also violating the vows and promises made by the clergy when they commit themselves before God and the Church to live a celibate way of life. Above all, it is the violation of the very beauty and purpose of human sexuality. Sexual abuse is sinful, psychologically traumatizing to the victims and it is equally a crime. This is disheartening and sickening to the stomach. There is no doubt that, we are seeing a demonic power at work both in the Church and in society at large. We are now in a Church where people are hurting and leaving, in a Church where people are confused and doubtful. In his book entitled 'Pastoral Care-(Regula Pastoralis)' Pope Saint Gregory the Great rightly says, *"For no one does more harm in the Church than he, who having the title or rank of holiness, acts evilly."*

*The book of Prophet (Ezekiel 34:1-11) says that, "The Lord will be Israel's shepherd because the shepherds have only taken care of themselves and neglected their flock. The Lord will therefore rescue the flock from the mouths of their shepherds. The Lord will search for his sheep and look after them."* When harm is done in the Church by the one who is charged with both authority and care for the people of God, the results produced are spiritual, psychological, emotional and physical sicknesses in the Church.

Depending on who and how one is reading this current crisis in the Church, it is obvious that, there is a problem and this problem needs to be addressed head-on and right now! However, others are reading supposedly *'a potential move towards Schism'* in the Catholic Church coming from those who are against Pope Francis' leadership despite the reality of the clergy sex abuse? Is there some rebelliousness of some sort that we are not aware of? Is there ecclesiastical coup going on? Further, does the current clergy sex abuse scandal also reveal which 'side of the Church's political camps' the US bishops belong either individually or as a group?

Is there anything happening on the background between the 'right-wing' and the 'left-wing' in our Church that we don't know? Could there be a potential 'war' between the conservatives and the progressives in our Church and everybody else is kind of being thrown into this arena? Is there any kind of 'power struggle within the inner circles of powers in the Church?' Are there any 'dirty politics' going on despite this obvious crisis in the Church? Is Pope Francis being targeted in this considerable animosity in the Church? Is the pontificate of Pope Francis being 'shaken?' Still, others are getting concerned and they ask, "What next is coming from the Church?" "What else should we expect and how soon is the next thing going to happen?" In all these questions, one thing is clear; these questions are good but they neither substitute nor answer the question why there is the clergy sexual abuse in our Church. In other words, all these questions do not get to the bottom and the reality of the clergy sexual abuse in the Church.

Still, some people have aired their opinions by saying that, *"this particular scandal will remain in people's minds and hearts for a long time."* Some people are either planning to withhold their donations to the Church or they have already started doing so. Similarly, others have expressed themselves by saying that, *"It is hard for us to trust the clergy anymore,"* or *"all the Bishops need to resign, some to be put in jail and some priests to be put in jail too, so that we can clean the whole house and get new people."*

Well, I get that! There are some justifications for this type of anger, frustrations and decisions. The perpetrators of the clergy sexual abuse needs to be identified and some necessary actions needs to be taken on them. At the same time, all the victims cry out for justice. However, we cannot exercise justice by creating more injustice. I mean there is no doubt that there are a lot of good bishops and good priests who are faithful in their call and ministry. When emotions run over our heads, it becomes really hard to exercise sound reasoning and when one refuses to reason, even solutions become problems. Therefore, although this way of thinking is emotionally appealing and justifiable, it is nevertheless morally incorrect. In other words, *'we cannot throw the baby out with the bathwater.'*

C.S. Lewis rightly says, *"I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."* Following this quote from C.S. Lewis, I beg to explain two identities and realities of the Church here: The Church is both human-(institutional) and divine-(the people of God) guided by the life of the Trinity. The Church which is also the Body of Christ, is also governed by human beings who have the potential to be holy but they are also susceptible to human weaknesses and mistakes which bring about sin in the Church and in the society.

However, in St. Matthew's Gospel chapter 19, Jesus says the following:

*"But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for such is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said, let children come to me."* Jesus said do not hinder the natural attraction that children have for the reality of God. Jesus said the realization of the Kingdom of God is dependent upon our care for children. This is interesting and troubling. Our current dystopian narrative - one in which we are called increasingly to **NOT** believe that people have rights, that people have value, that people have responsibilities - in our current climate, the human quality of childhood has been called into question.

Given this, why the focus on the Catholic Church? Why are we given so much press when other Christian groups and other religious institutions share in the guilt in failing to look after children properly, of ignoring the words of Jesus? But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for such is the kingdom of heaven. To me the answer is simple: We are supposed to stand for something greater. We are supposed to be exemplars of what it means to live in a healthy world, a healthy culture, a healthy Church. We are supposed to be better and, when we fail, our failure looks all the more dramatic. Our failure also looks dramatic when we fail and will not admit that we have failed. If we know that children have been hurt in our churches, by members of our clergy, if we know that and do not call those people to justice, the failure is all the greater.

How can we have a Church that stands for the goodness and peace of Christ, the same Christ who said: Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for such is the kingdom of heaven? When we fail in that, our fall is mighty. When people find out that we, who claim to stand up for Christ and his word and his righteousness, fail to protect the most vulnerable and lie to protect a corrupt institutional structure, we have failed mightily.

What are we supposed to stand for? We are supposed to stand for integrity. We are supposed to stand for justice; we are supposed to stand for Truth, the truth that is Jesus Christ. And if we are going to stand for integrity and justice and Truth, then we must be, first and foremost in our world today, people of healing. So I say: *"Let healing be our goal and let us move in this direction as we fight our current crisis in the Church."*

Let me point out a few painful realities here:

First, the biggest wounds lie in the victims themselves because they are the ones living and experiencing these wounds and suffering the consequences of pain, shame and stigma in their lives. We need to pray and support these individuals as much as we can. The wounds and sorrows of all the sexual abuse victims cry out for healing and contrition on the part of the Church of God.

Second, although some people may not *'see or agree'* with this point, it is nevertheless a very true point. This is about the perpetrators and those in the position of authority who facilitated in cover-ups of any kind. They too have the wounds of their moral irresponsibility, guilt, shame and almost *'dead conscience'* in their hearts. Their hearts are wounded by their crimes and violence they have exercised against the people of God most especially to the minors and vulnerable in our society. They definitely experience psychological, emotional, social and spiritual sickness. These too need our prayers that our good Lord may help them in their soul searching so that their spiritual sicknesses may turn to true sorrow and conversion of their hearts and minds to God.

Third, there are so many good, authentic, sincere, honest and genuine priests who work really hard and tirelessly in pastoring the people of God entrusted to their care. These too need our prayers because of the stigma, mistrust, suspicion and difficult situations they have been put in to by their brother priests who violated their power and trust before God and the people of God. These good priests need to be strengthened by our prayers.

Fourth, for the good, dedicated and truthful bishops who are accountable, faithful and exercise true care and leadership of the Church and the people of God entrusted to their care. With the examples of people like Ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, good bishops are put to the test. They face anger, distrust and all sorts of bad names from the people of God because of the sins of their brother bishops who either committed sexual abuse or covered up the sexual abuse scandals. These good bishops need to be strengthened by our prayers too.

Fifth, the people of God in general. The people of God (all the believers), need to pray seriously and get back to the roots of their faith. They need to reclaim their *"priestly, prophetic and kingly"* mission given to them from the time of their Baptism.

Sixth, the Pope. Last but not least, Pope Francis needs a lot of prayers so that, he can exercise his leadership and judgment well in the waves and winds of all this awful storm of the abuse and scandal affecting priests, bishops and the people of God. Pope Francis has the task of not only spearheading justice and healing to the victims but also exercising justice to the perpetrators plus the big task of directing the universal Church in the rightful way of hope in the midst of all that the Church is currently facing.

It is very true and just to say that, both the Church authority and the civil authority need to work together in order to exercise truth and justice to both the victims and the perpetrators. At the same time, it is equally very true and just to say that, the rest of us who do not belong to either the Church authority or the civil authority have a noble task to perform. This task is to pray without ceasing for the all the victims of clergy sexual abuse, and for reparation for the crimes of the perpetrators. Our Catholic Christian spirituality, our power of faith, our power of prayer and hope will surely carry us through this current storm in our Holy Church. This task is given to us freely and nobody can take away this task from us. It is given to us right from the moment of our baptism. Through our baptism we all share in the threefold identities of Christ. That is; priest, prophet and king. This is our *'common priesthood'* or the *'priesthood of all the believers.'*

Therefore, in the midst of all this problems of sexual abuse, no one can say that, *"I don't have anything to do in all this because it does not concern me."* No, this is not true! No one can be passive in this crisis. We all need to be proactive in this current situation in our Church; the Church we so dearly love. We are all in this war of fighting against any form of sexual abuse not only in our Church but in our society in general; whether it is in our own families, schools, hospitals, care centers, work places or government settings. It is a form of manipulation of the people by those in authority and in positions of trust and care. We cannot afford to run away from the Church. We have to 'stay put' and fight for the Church's morality. It is the time to be brave and courageous Catholics in our faith as opposed to fearful and cowardly Catholics. Like Saint Francis of Assisi, we all need to hear the voice of Christ telling us, ***"rebuild my Church."***

Any form of sexual abuse is a crime. It is violence against person's body and soul, and in our Christian spirituality, it is called sin. Sexual abuse is an epidemic and a drawback to freedom, trust, development, human dignity and conscience. Sexual abuse is against the morals of western civilization which is the Catholic Church. It is equally against any genuine democracy on earth and therefore, this has to be resisted in all truth. Sin and scandals in the Church undermine and compromise the Church's own mission: including the teachings of the Church, helping the poor, the sexual morality of the Church and the very primary task of the Church which is evangelization.

**Is clerical celibacy a problem? Should celibacy be optional in the Catholic priesthood? Should priests be allowed to marry as a way of ending the sex abuse crisis in the Church?**

The Second Lateran Council was convened in the year 1139 AD. It was in this council where by, the rule of mandatory celibacy within the Catholic clergy was approved as a living tradition of the Roman Catholic priesthood. Later on, in the year 1563, the Council of Trent reaffirmed this tradition of celibacy. Celibacy therefore, is **NOT** a dogma within the Catholic Church **BUT** is a discipline/rule within the Church's tradition. We also know that, the discipline of celibacy was placed for practical reasons like to prevent embezzlement of funds and Church goods from the married clergy and their families, nepotism and so forth.

There are absolutely practical reasons for celibacy within the clergy: for example; priests availability, undivided love, commitment to the Church and the people of God and so forth. However, these are **NOT** the best arguments about celibacy. They are bad arguments of celibacy which portrays that, our bodies and our sexuality are evil and therefore, celibacy and priestly vocation is "**higher**" than marriage vocation. Saint Augustine is a very good Christian thinker but I have to say that, he was the first Christian thinker to start thinking that, "body and sexuality are evil and therefore, they are an impediment to our salvation." "Celibacy is **NOT** higher than married life."

The idea of viewing marriage life as “less than celibate life” simply because marriage life involves sex and celibate life does not involve sex, is absolutely a bad Dualistic approach of Christian faith is one of the earliest Christian heresies that were condemned by the early Church fathers and first Christian apologists.

Our faith does not hold that, “our spirit/souls are good and our bodies/and our sexuality are bad.” This way of thinking is very platonic, dualistic and Manichean. The book of Genesis says that, “*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.*” (Genesis 1:31). So are our bodies good? Absolutely yes. Are our souls good? Absolutely yes. Is sex and our sexuality good and holy? Absolutely yes. It is good that ‘not all of us are celibates’ otherwise we would all disappear from the face of the earth because we would not be having new generations to replace the ‘old and the dead.’

Nevertheless, after saying all this, I think it is important to ask the ultimate question here. What is our goal as Christians? In other words, do we only exist because of our bodies, sexuality, marriage and celibate life? Is that all? The answer is simply no. We exist for God and therefore, we are naturally wired for God because God is our destiny, our fulfillment, our joy and wholeness. This is the ultimate reason for our existence.

Having said all this, still there is one question unanswered. Why celibacy in the clergy and the religious? The purpose of celibacy is for metaphysical reason. What does this mean? It simply means that, “***celibacy points to the transcendental love of God to his people***” because God is the ultimate reason for our human existence.

The first mistaken idea in the current situation of the Church is that, all this is about celibacy. Some within the Catholic Church and outside the Catholic Church are tempted to think that, celibacy is the problem and it is the cause of the sex abuse scandals among the clergy in the Catholic Church. So a good number of people may think that if celibacy is removed or made optional, this will be a good solution to curb the epidemic of sex abuse. At the same time, some people are of the view that, “the Diocesan priests should get married but the Order priests and Monastic priests should be celibate?” Really? Is priesthood divided?

Are the Diocesan priests not ordained in the same way and in the same Catholic Church just like the Order, Missionary and Monastic priests? Remember the term 'clerics' applies to Permanent deacons, Transitional deacons, Priests, Bishops, Cardinals and the Pope. So if only the Diocesan priests are allowed to get married, what about the other clerics like the Order, missionary and monastic priests, Bishops and the Pope? All clerics share in the same priesthood of Jesus Christ. It is also worth noting that, the Pope, Cardinals and Bishops, were, and still are, first priests before they climbed up the hierarchical ladder. That is; they were Diocesan priests, Missionary priests, Order priests or Monastic priests.

If we eliminate celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church, what will happen to all the celibate men and women religious communities of "Sisters, Nuns and Brothers" in the Roman Catholic Church? That is only one problem.

Let's go to the next problem. If celibacy is abolished in the Church and priests are allowed to get married, where will the salary of the married priests come from? What will happen if the priests get divorced and their families become dysfunctional? What will this do to the whole Church? Well, I feel suggesting the elimination of celibacy in the Catholic priesthood is a wrong thing to do. This may cause more problems in the Catholic Church than what we are already experiencing.

Although I have not been a priest for long enough, I can truly tell you this: The hardest promise or vow in priesthood is **NOT** celibacy. It **IS** obedience! Even for those who have been priests for long enough, they will still tell you the same thing I just said. *"The hardest promise or vow in priesthood is obedience and not celibacy."* When one violates the promise or vow of celibacy, he or she simply choose to disobey the promise or vow of celibacy. Obeying or disobeying the promise or vow of celibacy is the key question to be explored when talking about celibacy. Therefore, to suggest eliminating celibacy all together from the Roman Catholic priesthood would be to suggest a very simplistic solution to a very complex situation. Even the ones who are advocating for celibacy to be removed from the Catholic priesthood, deep in their hearts they know that, celibacy is easier than obedience.

On this same subject of, St. Thomas Aquinas says this, "*after living in a religious community and experiencing religious community life, I conclude that, it is much more difficult to live in a community life than living a celibate life.*" With this remark, St. Thomas concluded that, to live a celibate life is much easier than to live with others in a community. Those who live in religious communities understand how it is much more challenging for them to submit their will and intellect because of the rules of their religious communities, living with others, or what their religious superiors ask of them, as opposed to living a celibate life. They know that celibacy is much easier than obedience and if they had a choice, would prefer obedience to be eliminated rather than celibacy.

The discipline of celibacy also challenges the clergy to strive day and night to conform their minds, hearts and lives to Christ whom they represent in the world because they are ordained in his name-(The priesthood of Jesus Christ 'In Persona Christi' and 'In Persona Ecclesia.')->This means 'in the name of Christ and his Church.' We also have scriptural precedent for priestly celibacy. In the Old Testament, 'priests' were married but there was also a practice of '*temporary celibacy.*' How and when? When a priest or the high priest was preparing to go to offer sacrifice to God, the priest had to abstain from sexual relations with his wife for some few days.

Our current crisis in the Church is **NOT** about celibacy. It **IS** about bad relationships. These bad relationships are exercised by those who are entrusted with power, authority, trust and care in the society/the Church. Religion is 'about relationships.' Bad relationships equals to bad ways of practicing religion, exercising power and exercising trust and care in the society. A discussion of the theological importance, the relevance of celibacy is a necessary one in the life of the Church. The reality of sexual abuse is not an argument against celibacy. It is simply not true. I do believe that some priests are not able to live the celibate life.

Father Paul Sullins is a married Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Washington DC. He is a Senior Research associate of the Ruth Institute. He is also a retired Professor of Sociology at the Catholic University of America in DC. In his research and interview about “celibacy rule of the Catholic clergy within the United States,” here is what he says after he researched and interviewed some Catholic married clergy and their wives and some Catholic celibate priests: *“My findings are interesting because 60% of the Catholic married priests and their wives are in favor of the celibate rule in the Catholic Church and 40% of the celibate priests are in favor of celibate rule in the Catholic Church.”*

I do believe, along with the late Cardinal Francis George of Chicago that a vocation to celibacy needs to be foremost in the discernment of a vocation to the Roman Catholic priesthood.

I do not believe that celibacy can be seen as an "undesirable" condition for priestly service. I also know that celibacy is **difficult**. Yes, biologically speaking, human beings have the nature and the instinct to beget; to pass on the torch of life and therefore to preserve the human species. Celibacy therefore, can be seen by some as 'one of the problems or causes of clergy sexual abuse epidemic.' Again, I agree that, celibacy is difficult! It is difficult **BUT** not impossible. And a priest is alone so that others may not be lonely!

Although celibacy in clergy is a Church discipline and not a dogma, it is nevertheless a good rule to be observed by the clergy as they act in the name and person of Christ and his Church. As much as celibacy appears to be hard and challenging in the Catholic Church, it is nevertheless, the uniqueness and the 'glue' of the Catholic Church most especially in the Roman Catholic priesthood.

Here are some facts on the ground: Statistics tell us that 81% of the reported clergy sexual abuse cases have involved priests/bishops with boys who are minor children and youths; young adult men, seminarians or younger priests, or even older adult men. In other words, these are clearly homosexual acts perpetrated against boys and men. Female have been victim of clergy sexual abuse too, but the numbers are lower 19% of the reported cases. The Church's teaching about homosexuality is clear; homosexual activities are intrinsically evil.

Homosexual activities are sinful acts and therefore, contrary to the Catholic faith and the moral teachings of the Catholic Church. At the same time, the Church's teaching about heterosexual activities is that, they are sinful acts if they are done outside the context of two legally married individuals; a man and a woman. Further, in the population at large, the majority of pedophiles are married, heterosexual men who abuse both boys and girls.

It sounds right therefore to say that, if these clergy sexual abusers were in need of marriage we would be seeing more cases of clergy sexual abuse with adult women rather than so much abuse of children and men.

### **How should priests be healthy celibates?**

Honestly speaking, I am sick to death of language about celibacy that is so spiritually sugar-coated that it means nothing. Our failure to talk about sex, sexual realities, sexual struggles in the Church among (we priests), is part of our current problem. In priestly ministry, some priests enjoy probing their parishioners about their sexual lives but the same priests are not ready even for a minute to truly come into the reality of their own sexual self. In other words, they either deny or they don't understand that they are both priests and sexual beings. In the second century, St. Irenaeus of Lyons gave us a very good quote when he said, "*The glory of God is man fully alive.*" As priests, we remain thoroughly sexual beings, including in the ways we relate to other people.

Genital relationships in marriage are only a part of our sexual identity. I am exercising my authentic sexuality in every interpersonal relationship I have. I am expressing my sexuality in words as mundane as table conversation and as profound as sacramental encounter. What does this look like in daily life? Saint Paul says: *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."* Healthy sexuality for the priest looks like the joy of getting up in the morning, or perhaps more in keeping with our context here, the joy of staying up late, not to revel in our own solitude, and whatever activities that solitude begets, but to be with others, to interchange with others, to be there for others, to serve others. As priests, our sexuality, our relationality, is comprised of offering what we have as a gift and giving it generously no matter what form it takes. A healthy celibate life in the priests is not possible unless the priests have learned the key to a healthy sexuality, unless their joy, pride and their ego are dependent upon service and that alone. If they fail to learn this, they become self-serving living their lives for their own gain rather than with integrity. Gain is in the service, not in the reward for service.

A second aspect of our sexuality is our need to encounter others in a meaningful way. Self-understanding and knowledge of the world is essential to a fruitful priesthood. In other words, good priesthood, built upon a solid foundation of celibacy, is the fruit of wisdom. Wisdom is merely the understanding of the various types of encounters that we have. What encounters? First there is the encounter with yourself. Of all the people in the world, please do not lie to yourself. Do not tell lies to yourself about yourself. Will this lead to suffering, a shivering and self-awareness? It most certainly will, but our encounters with the souls of others, that intimate encounter, must proceed from an honest place in ourselves. The worst kind of co-dependence and enmeshment is the one who uses a privileged spiritual relationship to fulfill one's own need, a need about which they are not honest with themselves or with the other.

I can tell you this: The greatest pain I feel in life is to experience your pain and to know that I have no power to take it away. I see your pain probably closer than you realize, and it hurts that you must live there. Every pastor knows this. Every confessor knows this. There is nothing more heartbreaking than to hear confessions week after week and know that, for some internal obstacle, the penitent cannot accept God's love and forgiveness, that the confessional is not a place of peace but a place to rehearse their deepest sense of unworthiness, week after week. Here we must rely on God's grace. Here we must depend upon his mercy!

Celibacy should be viewed positively rather than negatively. Celibacy is a gift within the Church and for the Church. One should enter to this type of life freely, willingly, cheerfully and joyfully. It is also clear and true that, it is not an easy life and so it is therefore, OK for one to be open and sincere and leave as early as possible rather than to be dishonest and cause problems to the people of God. No one is forced into the priesthood and it is not a must for one to be a priest just the same way it is not a must for one to marry or to remain single.

It is good to note that, 'only the grace of God can enable one to live a true celibate life.' One cannot truly live a celibate life simply by his/her own efforts and powers. There are those who have a wrong understanding of celibacy in priesthood. They think that violation of celibacy would only mean priests or bishops having sexual affairs with women but it is OK for priests or bishops to have sexual affairs with other men? Excuse me! This is absolutely wrong thinking. Celibacy is broken or violated by any celibate priest, nun or bishop who indulges in sexual affairs with either women or men period.

*In Mtt 19:12*, Jesus recognized that, not all are gifted to be celibate. It is OK to get married because marriage is not a 'lesser vocation.' Marriage is a prime vocation because it is through marriage one does like "God." This is the act of creating other human beings and some of them can become priests; (priests don't come from heaven or trees but they are true human beings born from families)! Similarly, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul puts it clearly when he says, *"It is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Cor 7:9).*

What is the current situation we are facing? How is it different from what we have already seen? The "spotlight" was first turned significantly on the Church in 2002. At that time, diocese and religious communities were struggling as various stories came forth about abuse situations, most involving priests and many, if not most, involving minors both male and female. This was a difficult time for the Church. In terms of study, the bishops commissioned what is today referred to as the John Jay Report.

Produced by the John Jay School of Criminal Studies, the report found that during a period of 52 years, from 1950 to 2002, over 10,000 persons had made allegations of child sexual abuse. (Remember that this was the focus in 2002). These accusations affected about 2 percent of the clergy in the United States. Of the accused, however, very few (about 6 percent) were convicted. Looking at a timeline, it was discovered that the number of allegations increased in the 1960's, peaked in the 1970's, declined in the 80's and settled in the 1990's. As it was designed, the report offers many statistics, some of which may be accurate today, some of which may be called into question today.

The study goes on to offer some profile of the abuse scenarios. It found that, "Like in the general population, child sex abuse in the Catholic Church appears to be committed by men close to the children they allegedly abuse." And "many (abusers) appear to use grooming tactics to entice children into complying with the abuse, and the abuse occurs in the home of the alleged abuser or victim." The study characterized these enticements as actions such as buying the minor gifts, letting the victim drive a car and taking youths to sporting events. The most frequent context for abuse was a social event, and many priests socialized with the families of victims. Abuses occurred in a variety of places, with the most common being the residence of the priest. When looking at victims, 81% were male, 22% were younger than age 10. The kinds of abuse ranged from inappropriate touching to much more serious incidents.

Concomitant to the Jay Report, in 2002 the USCCB meet in Dallas and put together some mechanisms for the protection of children and young people commonly known as "*The Dallas Charter*" which was revised in 2005, 2011 and 2018. These mechanisms are used in all the Catholic Churches in the United States. The focus of this Charter was the provision of safe environment for young people in the life of the Church. This policy has been known as the "*zero tolerance policy*."

How have these issues been addressed and what is the current condition of the Church, now, 16 years after the 2002 scandal? First of all, dioceses, as far as they have been able, have followed the 'Dallas Charter' in letter, if not always in spirit. Most dioceses have put programs in place, have dealt with the crisis in forthright manner and are currently participating in significant ways for the most part. Catholics in the pews, for the most part following the 2002 crisis, have remained faithful to the Church although generally speaking some young people may be propelled over the edge to leave the Church. I fear it may be the case. However, since the 2002 Dallas Charter, it has proved that, the safest environment for children currently is within the Catholic Church. Given our current storm, it might be hard to see and comprehend this fact but nevertheless this is true.

Furthermore, without making any defense of the clergy (of which I am one of them), statistics rightly shows that, the highest cases of sexual abuse of minors whether reported or not reported comes from the ordinary friends whom we trust. These could be our neighbors, our family members, our trusted relatives, teachers, managers of different companies, people in medical care, psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors and so forth. In short, the highest number of cases of sexual abuse of any form comes from the non-clerical people. Again, this is not to defend any clergy who indulge in any form of sexual abuse but rather to state the observable and measurable facts on the ground.

What about our priests? Going back to the statistics, only a handful of the clergy are directly involved in these allegations and many of them from times in the distant past. That does not change however, how people are thinking about priests today. We know that in years past, being a priest, becoming a priest was the greatest vocation to which a young man could aspire. Today, I would say it is largely a battle. I can also say this; we have courageous, intelligent, faithful and devout men called seminarians. It is my concern that they understand, unflinchingly, the situation in the Church today and move forward, healing and caring for wounded people.

How should this be accomplished? I return now to the situation of the Church faced in 2002. The problem existed, or so we were told at that time, with priests. This was both true and not true. Certainly, the spotlight was on priests in this scenario, but bishops were also responsible. In fact, in the aftermath of the scenario, several bishops were moved at that time. It was true that priests were involved and so, in its wisdom, the Vatican decided to embark upon a visitation of seminaries. It seemed like a logical move. The Vatican asked important questions such as: Were there deficiencies in Seminary formation? Were there problems with the screening process? There was a great deal of energy expended at that time on examining seminaries. All the seminaries underwent investigations by the Vatican. Some adjustments were made in seminaries. In recent weeks, there has been some call on the part of some "commentators" in the Church to visit seminaries again.

In the aftermath of seminary visitations, what were the seminaries told? The seminaries were told that they needed to clamp down on "outside" influences in seminary life. They were told that, seminary should be a refined, cocoon-like environment, a hothouse of formation. And seminaries should not allow women to be overly influential in seminary formation. Seminaries should not allow lay people to be too prominent in formation. Seminaries should have only priests doing this or that. I think that is humorous, since the very bishops who have called for an "all priests" environment seem quite unwilling to offer priests either for graduate studies or for work in the seminary.

What are the seminaries told now? They are now being told that, they need more lay people around. Cardinal Ouellette (The Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops) says seminaries need more women around. The congregation for the clergy encourages bishops to provide more priests for seminary work. What should the seminaries do? Are they to respond to this new request, knowing that in a few years the ideological tide may turn again and seminaries will be told to go back to a highly clerical environment? It is difficult for seminaries to navigate on this question. Seminaries are however told that, *"provide us with the very best, but; of course, we don't want to pay for it."*

There are other problems as well. There are problems in our Dioceses. Dioceses are almost universally dealing with parish restructuring, with a perceived clergy shortage, with growing cultural diversity, with and, at times, antiquated school system, with generational problems, to name just a few. Dioceses, however, are also dealing with a clericalized culture that is highly problematic in the current climate.

**What is the root cause of the current sexual abuse crisis in our Church?** Well, the root cause of this is not one cause but rather multiple causes. Let me share my reflections of what I feel and think are the roots causes of this crisis:

**Sin:** Although our modern society would like to skip this reality, sin still remains the first cause behind the sexual abuse epidemic. The fallen nature in humanity which is characterized by the original sin creates concupiscence in human heart. This is the natural tendency to do the wrong thing/sin instead of doing the right thing/holiness, and it brings about inadequate and incongruent behaviors in human beings. Even the so called 'good and holy people' have within them the inclination to sin. Sexual abuse is a sin against the six and ninth commandments and the dignity of the whole person. Is there remedy for this? Yes, the Christian remedy for this is conversion so that we can retain our faith and get back to Jesus Christ. We need to get back to our Christian basics and see sin is all around us and together we need a day-to-day conversion through Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of humankind.

**Mental or psychological illness:** Psychologically speaking, some of the abusers are likely to have a history of being abused themselves and may come from very abusive backgrounds. Some might also have a history of mental illnesses of some sort. Predators who see 'nothing wrong' in their conscience as they continue abusing minors can be neither sorry nor repentant, because that is not in their world view, and so they cannot see anything wrong in what they are doing. This category of individuals are likely to cause more harm to minors before they are discovered because they often have very sneaky tricks to lure minors most especially by presenting themselves very friendly, caring, sincere and very reliable individuals. As such, they win trust both from the minors and from their parents.

**Clericalism and Elitism:** This is the terrible abuse of power and trust against the people of God because of the clerical title/state that one holds in the Church. Clericalism is to be distinguished from the word clerics/clergy. Clerics/clergy are ordained ministers of the Church who have the following ranks; Deacons, Priests and Bishops (of course the Cardinals and the Pope falls in the rank of Bishops). Clericalism on the other hand means the mentality; the attitude and the idea that, these ordained ministers of the Church are like a cult, the elites or a caste system of *'their own.'* Clericalism or elitism tempts some clerics to think that 'they cannot be wrong, questioned and answerable or held accountable in whatever they are doing. Some people suspect that, some of the homosexual net-work within the clergy and the hierarchy are known, protected and covered within the clergy homosexual network itself. They do this by abusing the sacrament of reconciliation. Once they know each other's homosexual practices, they go to confession to one another so that they can 'cover and protect one another in the confessional seal.' This attitude is tainted with narcissistic behaviors, manipulation of others and is 'very-self-serving' rather than serving God and his people; the Church. This is toxic and very damaging to the Church and her members. The institutional Church therefore, is responsible for making a formal apology on behalf of the living and dead abusers to all the abused victims living and dead. This is a fitting penance on the part of the institutional Church.

**Infidelity and lack of accountability:** When faithfulness, accountability and responsibility lack in any individual, society or organization, a problem always arises. Therefore, we need fidelity, accountability and responsibility in the Church. This is a responsibility of everyone in the Church starting with the Pope, Cardinals, Bishops, Priests, Deacons and the laity. No one is 'off the hook.'

**Society and the secular culture in general:** When the Benedictine movement was established in the sixth century, the signs of the times read one thing: Trouble. Benedict established the ideals of the Benedictine ethos in times of trouble, in times of social and political upheaval. Today we offer the quaint expression “barbarian invasions” to name this upheaval in Europe. It means very little to us today, but at the time the barbarian invasions signaled the wholesale destruction of culture, the breaking apart of the Roman Empire, of its political and social ideals, of its cultural institutions, its education systems, and its literary world.

Whole swaths of intellectual history preserved by the Romans were lost, including the works of historians, philosophers, poets, and playwrights. Into this morass of violence and normlessness, Benedict came to provide, as far as possible, an oasis of sanity and tradition to a world careening out of control. What was the Benedictine ideal? How can we describe it?

I believe St. Benedict understood that Christian identity and Christian practice must be at the very heart of the ideals of the Church. He also understood that this identity and this practice must be total; it must encompass every aspect of the human person. It must be something that one wakes with in the morning and goes to bed with at night. Christian identity and Christian practice meant informing not only MY life, but that of all I might encounter through my witness to the world. It was the new evangelization of the sixth century.

Benedict also understood what we today refer to as the domestic Church, the ideal of a Church that exists not only within the parameters of formal worship, but also within the ideals of daily living. Is this not also our ideal as modern Christians? There can be little doubt that there is need for such a witness today.

Like Benedict we are living in difficult times. We are living in times of pain and scandal for the Church. We are being challenged every day to forge through the mess of what we are almost hourly encountering in unfolding problems for the institution. Like Benedict's own time, we are living in a world of normlessness, of confusion, and part of that mess lies squarely in the institution of the Church. How can we help our Church and our world to heal? Since the sixties, religion and moral fabric of our society has dropped substantially.

We no longer teach faith and morals to our children at home as used to be the case before the sixties. Sexual revolution has forcefully affected the sexual morality in our society. The media and 'pop culture' has now replaced the natural law, moral law and the divine law. Thus, the truth about the spirituality of our sexuality has been compromised a whole lot in our modern and post-modern culture.

Sexuality is becoming less, and less linked with love, marriage and the family in view of procreation, but now is viewed as more of a 'feeling or act' which one can do with anybody, anytime and almost anywhere. Unfortunately, this idea is also very present in the minds and hearts of some Christians.

### **The two political terms of Traditional/Conservative and Progressive/Liberal:**

Politically speaking, the extreme of these two opposing spectrums in our Church are characterized by either being traditional/conservative or progressive/liberal. The traditional are likely to be deep in the Catholic traditions and somehow very rigid. On the other hand, the progressives are likely to be very secular in their faith and less serious in their Catholic beliefs. In other words, the stereotypical traditional Catholic sees things as more **'black and white'** and may have Church and God in **'a box'** while the stereotypical progressive Catholic can tend to see more **'shades of gray'** but may **'water down'** some teachings and beliefs of the Church. This can lead to **"Cafeteria Catholicism."**

Is conservative versus liberal really way for us to describe our Christian faith? Do we need these two political terms to be our standard and our identity in our faith in Jesus and his Church? Probably not! We are Catholic Christians and that is enough.

**Our Seminaries/Religious Orders:** The program for priestly formation commonly known as *"Pastores Dabo Vobis"* insists on the formation of priests in the circumstances of the present day. The four areas of Catholic priesthood training in any seminary in the world are as follows: **Human formation, Spiritual formation, Intellectual formation** and **Pastoral formation**. Although these four areas of priestly formation need to be balanced, I can tell you this: Human formation needs a thorough and special attention. That is why Pope Saint John Paul II says that, *"human formation is the foundation of all the other three areas of the Catholic Priesthood formation."* That is; before a candidate/candidates is/are ordained to the priesthood, the candidate/candidates should be well matured as a person. Why? Because it is *"a human being, (a man), who is ordained to the priesthood"* and therefore, human maturity comes first before spiritual, intellectual and pastoral maturity. The divinity of Christ should be reflected in the humanity of the priest. In other words, Priests relates to us as human beings who should help us to **'CONNECT'** with the **'DIVINE.'** At the same time, priest's unique calling is ***"taking people to God and bringing God to people."***

Further, in the *"Ratio Fundamentalis,"* the document produced by the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome to oversee seminary formation, the ideal of priestly formation, that what we call 'Theology,' is not a time of discernment; one's discernment should be completed before becoming a Theology seminarian. Theology Seminarians therefore, should not be in an active discernment mode; they should be preparing to be priests. That is; they should be men destined for service in the Church, as mature men, as men who only (ONLY) have the needs of the Church in their minds and hearts.

Following all the revelations of our current sexual abuses by the clergy, there is definitely a need for a lengthy and a well-integrated course in human sexuality in all the seminaries. Any candidate applying to join the seminary should be properly screened before being accepted and if any applicant is found to have any sexual pathology that could lead to predatory behavior he should not be admitted into the seminary. Furthermore, if any seminarian is discovered to have any psychosexual illness before they enter the priesthood they should be discontinued for the good of the Church and the people of God.

I strongly feel that our Seminaries, Religious Orders, Novitiates, and Religious Houses of Studies need to engage more skills and avenues both in selecting suitable candidates and in forming them properly, thoroughly and adequately in this area of human formation. The Seminary staff, the Religious Orders staff and the ordaining Bishop and the people of God need to have a clear, thorough and good knowledge of the candidate/candidates to be ordained. It is not enough just to fill out some paper work and conduct formal interviews in order to be convinced of the candidate's suitability for ordination. It is also not enough for seminarians or religious students evaluating themselves on their written documents about themselves.

The staff should evaluate the seminarians and the religious students so thoroughly that when they compare what the seminarians have written about themselves to what the staff has written about them, more truth may be revealed about the seminarians suitability for continuing in seminary and hopefully for future ordination.

There is also a need for other informal settings: deep human formation classes with deep questions about life, inspiration, sacrifices, candidates motivations to the priesthood, celibacy and married life also recreations, parties, seminary outings, mixing with different genders so that, a seminarian/seminarians are free and willing to gauge themselves and continue deciding whether or not they are called to the priesthood. In other words, more avenues of exposure are needed for the seminarians so that they can truly be known well prior to their ordinations.

Seminarians and religious Orders students need to be both encouraged to see if God is calling them to the priesthood but they equally need to be told the truth as early as possible during their seminary life. In other words, if they are unfit they should be expelled immediately. Further, the screening of the seminarians, religious Orders students, seminary professors and seminary formators should be done promptly. Here I agree with Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI when he said, *“any seminarian, a professor or a formator who manifests ‘deep seated homosexual tendencies’ should be withdrawn from the seminary as soon as possible.”* These tendencies undermine the very mission of the Church, the morality of the Church and Christ who is the perfect example of both celibacy and sexual morality.

The seminary or priesthood is 'not a place for therapy for those with homosexual tendencies and behaviors' or any other psychological issue. Going back to the '2002 USCCB Dallas Charter', one of the outcomes of the "2002 USCCB Dallas Charter policy" for Seminaries was the necessity of preventing a dismissed seminarian from entering another seminary for a period of time.

It is sad to point out that, there are some seminaries that chose purposefully neither to follow the "2002 USCCB Dallas Charter rules" nor the Vatican's. Some of these seminaries do not believe, for example, that psychological testing is important. Some do not believe that they are required to follow the guidelines by consulting other seminaries a student has attended when matriculating into a new seminary. These lax seminaries are problematic, but they may not indicate that the Church's current challenges are seminary based. Given the current climate in our Church, I would say that, I think it is the duty of each seminary and school of theology to train seminarians away from inauthentic clerical culture.

What is inauthentic clerical culture? Father Dennis Robinson OSB, the rector of Saint Meinrad Seminary in Southern Indiana where I and some of our diocesan priests studied, has this to say: *“I cannot tell you enough of how sick I am of thoughts about priestly life and culture that center on the best scotch and the best cigars. Ideals of clerical privilege are bred of overwrought desires to ‘soften the blow’ of priestly service by creating pockets of self-comfort. Seminaries must not rely on the internal forum as a shelter for hiding problems that must be dealt with publicly, for the good of the Church. We cannot have seminarians who try to submarine their way through seminary so they can promote a vision of the Church that is both inauthentic and unhealthy in so many ways.”*

As a priest who was once a seminarian, I know that, good things are happening in most seminaries and we have good seminarians. However, my intention is only to put some more emphasis in the area of human formation. Saint Thomas Aquinas says that, *“Good priests will always be available without any shortage provided that; good candidates are encouraged and properly trained and unworthy candidates are discouraged and dismissed.”*

In other words, we should not be worried of the so called ‘shortage of priests to the detriment of picking any candidate to fill-in the seminary’ but we should be comfortable with ‘few’ candidates and priests but of good quality rather than the quantity of seminarians and priests. Last but not the least, all the seminary formators and faculties should be well screened both in what they teach and in their moral life styles.

Below is the prayer that Pope Saint John Paul II prayed at St. Mary’s Seminary Chapel in the Archdiocese of Baltimore in 1995. Saint Mary’s Seminary was founded in 1791. Saint Mary’s Seminary and University was the first Catholic Seminary in the United States. It was granted a civil charter by the State of Maryland in 1805 and in 1822, Pope Pius VII established it as the first Seminary in the U.S to grant ecclesiastical degrees, which it still does to this day.

*"Father, in every season, you call forth disciples to follow your Son and laborers to tend your vineyard. In our time, we ask you to raise up dedicated priests to serve your Church. We pray especially for seminarians who search their lives and hearts for the signs of your call. Let them hear your voice and respond generously to the promptings of your Spirit. Above all, teach them the good they can accomplish by living as priests. Show them the joy to be found by preaching the Gospel, celebrating the Eucharist, and being pastors to your people. Bless them as you form them into your future priests. Give your grace to all bishops, priests, deacons, and men and women in consecrated life. May the humble and loving example of Mary, Mother of God and Seat of Wisdom, always inspire them and may her intercession guide them in their service. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen."*

**Should Psychiatrists, Psychologists and Counselors play a key role in approving suitable candidates for Catholic priesthood training?**

Well, the answer is **Yes** and **No**! Yes if the psychologist assist in the psychological evaluation of young men who are to enter into the seminary and as they proceed with their seminary formation. No if the psychiatrists or psychologists recommend some 'mental emotional, psychological or sexual disorders treatments.' I feel that, any seminarian or a religious Order student who has some problems in these areas can be taken to treatment but 'not back to the seminary or to the ministry if one is a priest.' At one time, the Church was reasoning this way but it proved not to work. In fact it worsened the situation in the Church.

## **How can we recover and heal from the current sexual abuse crisis in our Church?**

Before I answer this question, let me first of all quote Canon 212 exactly what it says:

*“Conscious of their own responsibility, the Christians faithful are bound to follow with Christian obedience those things which the sacred pastors, inasmuch as they represent Christ, declare as teachers of the faith or establish as rulers of the Church. The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires. According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons.”*

**Conversion:** 'Conversion means change of heart and mind.' We might think of these last six or seven months as a kind of examination of conscience both personal and collectively. It seems like that is what Pope Francis is asking our US Bishops when he instructed them not to move too swiftly to answers in their recent (November 2018) gathering in Baltimore. His dramatic interruption of the past November US Bishops conference proceedings may well have been an invitation to sit for a moment in our weariness and weakness, to remain here in the soul of crisis in order to realize, at the rock bottom of our collective consciousness, who we are. Here I am reminded of some words of Winston Churchill in his early writings. He wrote as reflection on his young life.

*"Hear this young men and women everywhere and proclaim it far and wide. The earth is yours and the fullness thereof. Be kind but fierce, you are needed now more than ever, take up the mantle of change, for this is your time."* My brothers and sisters this is our time for conversion/change.

**Spiritual renewal and purification of the Church:** In the sixties, Pope Saint Paul VI said, *“the big error of our time is the split between our faith and our daily life.”* This means we have to turn to the great spiritual sources of our faith. For example; deep prayer and fasting, the gospel values, the Church Fathers, the Councils of the Church, the Magisterium of the Church, the Creed, the life of sacraments, seriousness in the Word of God and especially during the time of worship which we commonly call the Mass or Liturgy, and also going back to the giants, moral and spiritual heroes called the Saints. In short, ***“let us return back to Jesus Christ.”*** The Church ‘is not a democratic arena’ but the people of God ***should*** exercise their kingly, prophetic and priestly ministry conferred to them during the sacrament of Baptism. In this time of purification, we have to accept the Church to experience a painful cleansing for the sake of goodness and appropriate Christian witness to the gospel values and Christian morality.

**Search for the truth:** What is the truth? This question has to be asked over and over in the light of all the sexual abuse scandals we are facing in our Church today. It is the truth that will set us free. So again, what is the truth? Who has the truth? Where is the truth? And how can we find the truth? This is the way that Christ uses to cleanse and to purify his beloved Church which is also our beloved Church. In order to get the truth, ‘the wheat has to be separated from the chaff.’

We see this clearly in the gospel of Matthew when John the Baptist says, *“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Mtt 3: 11-12).* We also see in the book of Malachi how God purifies his priests. *“He will sit refining and purifying silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi (priests), refining them like gold or like silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord” (Mal 3:3).* The only way for God to bring the whole truth about the sexual abuse scandals into light is when we pursue the truth by using the secondary causes to purify and cleanse our Church. God is always the first cause of revealing the truth but he also uses the secondary causes to reveal the truth.

What are the secondary causes? Examples of the secondary causes are; proper and thorough investigations, the laity, priests, bishops, lawyers and grand jury to all be involved in this pursuit of truth. Righteous anger is also helpful and a necessary tool in our current situation in the Church. Saint Robert Bellarmine rightly says that, *"He who is not angry, whereas he has cause to be, sins."* In this way, we will find, *"the way, the truth and the life"* because it is the positive way of acting against these scandals.

**Fidelity:** Faithfulness is one of the key characteristics towards recovery and healing from the current sex abuse crisis in the Church.

**Petitioning the Vatican to create a mechanism to 'police' the Bishops:** The Vatican needs to sponsor and empower largely lay led investigations composed of the skilled lay people. Once this is accepted and done, it would be appropriate for this group to have the access to the relevant Diocesan documents/records in order to disclose any kind of abuse, embezzlements of funds and so forth in the Dioceses. Another option would be what Cardinal Muller, (the former Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith) said. His idea is that, there is a need to set up a tribunal in the Vatican that will be empowered by the Pope to particularly be in charge of investigating the Bishops and the Cardinals in case of any accusations against them.

**Zero tolerance policy:** The zero tolerance policy should always be supported and fully implemented in case of any abuses without any cover-up from anybody to anybody period.

**Good leadership and accountability from the Priests and Bishops:** Accountability should be a must not only from the priests but also from the bishops. Any one in a position of trust and leadership must carry within himself both responsibility and accountability. There should be some particular mechanisms that will hold Bishops accountable and answerable in anything that is questionable. This mechanism should be free from any prejudice or intimidation.

**Bishops unity/speaking with one voice and not contradicting each other:** It is paramount that the Church leaders should always speak with one voice. We are not interested in their 'personal opinions or preferences.' We are interested in hearing only one thing; the truth according to God and his Church, period.

**The role of Catholic Christian families in nurturing true vocations:**

Examining the ideals of the domestic Church in a contemporary U.S perspective, one must keep in mind the foundational principles of U.S. culture, particularly the separation of Church and state. This ideal has afforded U.S. Catholics a great deal of freedom from a historical point of view, but it may also have had an eroding effect on the ideals of Church as understood by classical ecclesiology, that is, the full integration of Church into the social order. For many of us, the Church is not a daily reality, but a place to go for a very limited time on Saturday or Sunday. The Church gives you '45 minutes to 1 hour' hint of spirituality once a week and you are on your way. We do not necessarily think of our parishes as a place to spend time, much less as places that offer us something real to take into the world.

We also think 'parochially' meaning that, we don't see ourselves as people belonging to the entire universal Church. We mostly see ourselves just belonging to our own 'little parish' in our own particular location. This way of thinking clearly disconnects us from the Diocese, nation, international and the Universal Church for which we truly belong as Catholic faithful. As Catholics, it is important for us to realize that, we are part of a larger connection in with our brothers and sisters all over the world; whether we see them or we don't see them and whether we know them or we don't know them. Catholic means Universal!

When we view our "civil" responsibilities as something so far removed from Church, we are left with a dilemma. How can we be faithful Christians in the world, how can we live our Christian values, cultivated in Church, "out there?" Another challenge for the domestic Church in contemporary U.S. culture is the general demise of domesticities. The home and the extended family are no longer the norm in U.S. culture the way they were 100 or even 75 years ago. As family units become increasingly distended, they provide less of the formational matrix that they once did.

Likewise, as family members engage in individual projects, they seem to be less likely to engage in religious activities or really any activities as a family. Some individuals or families are tempted to engage in religious activities in the Church but only for what we call “*cafeteria Catholicism*” meaning; ‘*picking and choosing*’ what they want from the Church and what they don’t care about. For example; some Catholic individuals may care very much about the doctrinal and pious devotions aspects of the Church rather than the social justice aspects of the Church or vice versa. As family life fragments, members turn to alternative support mechanisms, and sometimes family life can become a kind of battleground as these individual mechanisms compete for dominance. Just as the domestic Church is demonstrating problems of identity, likewise the contemporary ecclesial environment is having problems. The battlefield of the sexual abuse crisis in the U.S. has left many, if not growing majority, with negative reactions to the institution of the Church.

An adage of previous generations was that young adults generally drifted away from the practice of Catholicism until the time of their marriage, or the first appearance of children. Then they tended to rejoin ecclesial structures, go to Church and participate in the activities of parishes and schools. This is less the case today. While the same drift exists in 20-somethings, there is not a concomitant return of young people as family structures begin to develop.

Given these realities, there is a need to reinvigorate the domestic Church-(families), beyond the parameters of ecclesial understandings, at least for the present. Cultural norms are changing and growing, as the institutional Church reforms itself for a new generation; likewise, the domestic Church must be strengthened and encouraged into a new strength and position.

As cultural norms within the Church continue to change and grow, the development of domestic Church seems to be not only a desirable outcome, but possibly the means of establishing a new credibility for Christian practice. If Christian ideals are to thrive, they must be given a wider place of involvement than formal institutional structures. The Church must move to the workplace, the schools, recreational centers and, of course, to the home.

In framing new attitudes to assist this necessary expansion, it is helpful to turn to a tried-and-true Christian ideal for community building. These seem to apply quite readily to the domestic Church.

First is the idea that there is such a thing as the domestic Church. Again, this is something that cannot be taken for granted in our contemporary cultural setting. A culture inundated in the “separation of Church and state” frequently places the ideals of living outside the parameters of formal religious institutions in the area of “state” and thereby closed off to any influence that is theological, liturgical and specifically moral. Saint Benedict proposes the ideal of finding God in all things and glorifying God in all things. True practice of faith becomes not esoteric knowledge, but wisdom distilled from the daily. Situating the presence of God in daily life becomes the first task of building the culture of the domestic Church.

Second, prayer is the center of the domestic Church. Domestic Church members have the task of centering prayer in the Church at home. Prayer is often seen as the domain of the institutional Church, yet there is the possibility of seeing prayer as an essential element of life and thereby practiced outside the material parameters of the institution.

Whether we are talking about priestly, religious or marriage vocations, I strongly believe that, families are the ‘*seed bed*’ of any type of vocations. It is here where we are first taught and experience religion, religious values and moral values whether it is natural law or moral law. This is why Pope Saint John Paul II rightly says, “*The family is the domestic Church.*”

There is a general belief that, ‘we are living in an era of religious decline.’ Contrary to that, the truth is that, ‘we are not living in an era of religious decline, but rather institutional decline.’ **It’s an issue about trust – lack of confidence in institutions.** Let’s see what the statistics says of what has happened to public trust from the 1970’s to today: These statistics comes from the author of the book, "Going, Going, Gone" by Saint Mary Press.

-----Public Trust Levels-----

	<u>1970's</u>	<u>Today</u>
Big Business.....	26%.....	18%
Medical System.....	80%.....	39%
The Presidency.....	52%.....	36%
Television News.....	46%.....	21%
Congress.....	42%.....	9%
Newspaper.....	39%.....	20%
Public Schools.....	58%.....	30%
Banks.....	60%.....	27%
Organized Religion.....	65%.....	41%

Based on the above statistics; the reality is that, we are experiencing a decline of trust in institutions but not so much of a religious decline as one may think. From the above statistics, it is evident that, religion is still leading and people still need and value religion in their lives. So we still ‘lead’ in religious matters as described by the above statistics. Therefore, the current problem in the Church is bigger than us. Let’s not ‘beat ourselves’ too hard. Let us continue to pray and asking God to continue taking control of his One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

**In the midst of our current Church crisis, is God still in charge? What is the remedy to the problem of the sex abuse scandal in our Church? How do we continue surviving in the Church which is already embattled? Should we run away from the Church? Where do we go from here? Is there any hope for us?**

In the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans (Rom 7: 14-21), St. Paul rightly states that, *“Even when we desire to do the good, sometimes we do the evil we hate.”* Yes, it is absolutely true that, ‘when one Christian is happy, the whole Body of Christ is happy. At the same time, when one Christian suffers, the whole Body of Christ suffers.’ We should therefore, be first and foremost, in solidarity with all the victims of the clergy sex abuse.

As a result of human evil and sinfulness, St. Paul asks the question: *“Who will save me from this situation of evil?”* And the answer to this question is; Thanks be to God we have someone to depend on who cannot disappoint us. This person is Jesus and Jesus alone.

From the McCarrick revelation, Pennsylvania revelation, to the Vigano revelation can we still trust the Church? Can we still have confidence in the Church? Does the Church still have moral authority and credibility in the world? Does the Church always need both cleansing and renewal?

Is the purification of the Church of Christ necessary? And is this the time for the purification of the Church? Should we fight for the Church or abandon the Church? How is the Church both the ‘Light of the world and the Salt of the earth?’ And above all, what is the Church’s origin, foundation and mission?

Yes, we can still trust the Church, yes we can still have confidence in the Church, yes the Church is being cleansed and renewed, yes we need to fight for the Church and not to abandon the Church and yes, the Church is both the ‘Light and the Salt of the earth’ because the mission and the identity of the Church is to bring hope, justice, mercy, forgiveness and meaning to our lives.

The Church’s mission is about the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. To that end, the Church is about promoting everything that is good before God and humanity and condemning everything that is bad before God and humanity.

The Church is about the beauty, the goodness and the truth in the life of the Trinity. In one statement, the Church is about the salvation of humankind. And so the Church is not about our own personal agenda but Christ's own agenda!

The sexual abuse scandal does not interfere with our pastoral work because it is the current pastoral work itself. Pastoral work entails dealing with all issues and problems of humanity in the light of Christ. That is why Saint Paul encourages Timothy by telling him, "*Preach the gospel in season and out of season*" (2 Timothy 4:2).

The sexual abuse scandal is '**the current Cross**' we *have* to carry as the Church. The Church is undergoing the necessary cleansing and renewal like the way Jesus cleansed the temple in (Mtt 21:12-17). We can look at our present situation through the eyes of Blessed Antonio Rosmini. Blessed Antonio Rosmini was an Italian Roman Catholic priest who was both a philosopher and a theologian. He founded the Rosminians religious congregation commonly known as the '*Institute of Charity*' in 1828. Antonio Rosmini had great love for the Church. He published his famous book called, "**On the five wounds of the Holy Church.**" It is undoubtedly the most famous of Rosmini's books, written with great passion and love for the Church. It caused him immense personal damage, but he felt that the renewal of the Church was of such great urgency that he had to be prepared to suffer for it. In his book '*on the five wounds of the Holy Church,*' he borrowed the image of the "**crucified Church**" from Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254). Antonio's book was widely known to the Bishops who took part in Vatican II, and many of the ideas of his book found their way in the Vatican II Documents.

Pope Paul VI called the 'Five Wounds of the Holy Church' "**a prophetic book.**" It is the opinion of many that some of the wounds are still waiting for a cure. We can certainly assert that, our current sex abuse crisis in the Church is one of the wounds '**waiting to be cured in the Church.**' The Five Wounds of Holy Church is a precious theological book on the Church that Rosmini loved with all his heart. This book clearly demonstrates the responsibility of the whole People of God for the Church.

We cannot lose hope with the Church because Saint Augustine rightly says to us that, *"Hope has two daughters; **anger** and **courage**. Anger in the way things are and courage that things will not remain this way. And so we will not remain without hope."* Therefore, let's 'hang-in' there!

In his book about God and the world, Pope Benedict XVI rightly says that, *"People will always need God and there will never be a time when people will not need God."* Similarly, people will always need priests and there will not be such like a time when people will not need priests even with the current sex abuse scandal in our Church. Saint Augustine understood very well his roles both as Bishop but also as disciple of Christ together with his flock. That is why he said, *"For you I am your Bishop and with you I am a disciple."*

He further strengthened and assured his flock that, if there are good sheep there will always be good shepherd. He said this when he wrote his famous sermon on pastors. Let us carefully see what he said to the pastors and about the pastors:

#### **Saint Augustine's Sermon on Pastors:**

*"Certainly, if there are good sheep there are also good shepherds; good sheep give rise to good shepherds. But all good shepherds are one in the one good shepherd; they form a unity. If only they feed the sheep, Christ is feeding the sheep. The friends of the bridegroom do not speak with their own voice, but they take great joy in listening to the bridegroom's voice. Christ himself is the shepherd when they act as shepherds. 'I feed them,' he says, because his voice is in their voice, his love in their love. But will there be shepherds who seek what is Christ's and not what is theirs, and will they be found? There will indeed be such shepherds, and they will indeed be found; they are not lacking, nor will they be lacking in the future."*

With the above encouraging sermon on pastors by Saint Augustine, we clearly see that, we need to *'raise our heads above the water'* so that this sex abuse 'tsunami' does not overwhelm us so that we don't 'sink' in our faith as we 'stick with the Church.' We are in the moment when our faith is made strong because Saint Peter says that, *"when we are challenged, tested and 'refined by fire like gold so that our faith can be of greater worth than gold" (I Peter 1:3-9).*

The Church is not our personal property. It belongs to Jesus Christ the Son of God who is God-Man. This is why during the Second Vatican sessions, one evening while Pope Saint John XXIII was praying his night prayers before going to bed, he concluded by telling God that, ***“Lord, this is your Church and I am going to bed.”*** John XXIII had a deep trust that the Church belongs to Christ and so must we.

### **So what is the priest’s identity and role in the Church today?**

Again Father Dennis Robinson OSB, the rector of St. Meinrad Seminary describes the ideal for which a priest should strive as he says the following: *“The priest is called to healing or service leadership and cultic leadership; healing leadership for the sake of cultic leadership. The priest leads by confecting the Eucharist in the exercise of his unique power. The Eucharist makes the Church and thus is the full manifestation of the new condition of humanity. The Eucharist is the source of human success in its striving to touch the transcendent, to grasp the things of heaven in a way that the pretense of human pride could not. If the priest is set apart in Holy Orders from all the others who have been set apart in Baptism, his status is for healing and service in the cultic action of the constitutive Eucharist. Like Joshua, the priest fights against the citadels of the compromised expectations of our condition and opens the gates of grace, not for his own sense of victory, but to feed a hungry people left to wander the desert. The priest has a dignity that is manifested in his willingness to fight for the people, even as Joshua railed against the walls of Jericho, even as Christ fought, all the way to Calvary. The priest has a dignity that is bound up with the fate of the people. The priest has a dignity that is directed always over the shoulder to encourage a people moving forward freed from the burdens of the earth. The priest has a dignity that is not his own, a dignity that rightly belongs to Christ.*

*The priest has a dignity that is always emptying itself like the breast blood of the pelican to give life to others. The priest has a dignity rooted in sacrifice. The priest has a dignity that bridges the fully human and the fully divine. The priest has a dignity that carries the people on his shoulders so that they can have a better look of that rich valley, that Promised Land, that God has called us to in calling us his sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in our dear Lord, Jesus Christ. The priest has a dignity that serves as a living icon of that dignity to which we are all called.*

*The priest has a dignity that is not his own. The priest is not his own. The priest is for God and the priest is for us. Yet, in some places, that dignity has been ruined. When we examine the conditions of the holy priesthood today, we must say that in its character, in its essence, there is no compromise to the priesthood.*

*The priesthood today is what Christ realized it to be in the institution of the sacrament of Holy Orders on the night he was betrayed. The priesthood, in essence, is what it is and its inherent dignity is complete and inviolate. But in our time of trouble, the perception of the dignity of the priest is another story. The essence of the priesthood is safeguarded by the matter and form of the sacrament and the assurances of apostolic succession. The perception of that dignity, however, is undoubtedly compromised. What, or perhaps who, has compromised the perception of the dignity of the priesthood? It is true that this perception has been assailed in the pretensions of an overweening, media-saturated culture. But let us not place the blame completely out there. It is also the product of our own folly. What compromises the dignity of the priesthood? First, I would say a lack of personal character on the part of priests. All of us are the products of our environment. Many of us have been raised in a highly commercialized culture in which we were told that we can have everything. We cannot. The character of the priest is dependent upon his ability to understand his nature, his function, and his place in the social and ecclesial order. The character of the priest is compromised when he tries to have 'his cake and eat it' too. It is compromised when he remains with one foot in the world of the so-called 'secular' and another in the sacred. 'Rank clericalism' is another problem in priesthood.*

*An authentic clerical spirit recognizes the uniqueness of the vocation and accepts the responsibility that that uniqueness necessitates. 'Rank clericalism' claims privilege without responsibility. Rank clericalism is more about the dress than the service. Rank clericalism insists upon respect without service. Rank clericalism is all about the look of the thing and nothing about the substance of the thing. Rank clericalism legislates according to tastes. Rank clericalism exercises power without consultation. This kind of clericalism destroys perception of the dignity of the priesthood by being all about me. Unfortunately, 'rank clericalism blends in with 'intellectual narcissism.'*

*Intellectual narcissism appears when the following conditions are present in a priest. That is; either a priest does not read anymore to update and sharpen his intellect or he thinks... 'Oh well, I know everything and nobody else knows more than me.' But Jesus said, 'Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'*

*As priests, we cannot be the instruments of hindering others' relationship with God. We are in need of that healing. We will become accustomed to that healing when we start thinking as men of God and stop thinking as men solely concerned with self. This is for our good and the good of our Church in troubled times."*

Hilaire Belloc says, *"The Catholic Church is an institution I am bound to hold divine – but for unbelievers a proof of its divinity might be found in the fact that no merely human institution conducted with such knavish imbecility would have lasted a fortnight."* Throughout the history of the Church, the Church has always suffered some crisis of some sorts. Each time of crisis is always yet another opportunity for the Church to grow, to be renewed and to be purified. This is exactly the time for the purification in the U.S. Catholic Church. There is hope for us in the Church and we cannot run away from the Church. Our hope and remedy is Jesus Christ. The foundation of our faith is in Jesus and Jesus alone. In Jesus, our faith is built on a firm foundation. Saint Peter knew this very well and when Jesus asked him, *"But who do you say that I am?"* Peter's answer was firm and clear, *"You are the Christ the Son of the living God"* (Mtt 16:15-16).

Our Lord entrusted the leadership of His Church on Peter when He said, *"You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven"* (Mtt 16:16-18). It is good for us to note that, the Church belongs to Christ and not Peter. At the same time, we cannot just simply justify what is happening in the Church by saying that, *"Oh well, what is happening in the Church is no different from what is happening in the entire society."* While we may acknowledge some of that to be true, the Church has a moral obligation in the society and more is expected from the Church in terms of moral obligation and good conduct from her ministers.

Our Lord did not promise that His Church will be without problems. But he promised us that, he will always be with us and His Church through the Holy Spirit as our sanctifier, protector and guider to the whole truth. God the Father has the vision of his Church very clearly. Let us see what this vision is:

The CCC# 845 rightly says, *“To reunite all his children, scattered and led astray by sin, the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son’s Church. The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. The Church is ‘the world reconciled.’ She is that bark which ‘in the full sail of the Lord’s cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world.”* According to another image dear to the Church Fathers, she (the Church), is prefigured by Noah’s ark, which alone saves from the flood.

Further, the CCC# 853 continues to say this, *“On her pilgrimage, the Church has also experienced the ‘discrepancy existing between the message she proclaims and the human weakness of those to whom the Gospel has been entrusted.’ Only by taking the ‘way of penance and renewal,’ the ‘narrow way of the cross,’ can the People of God extend Christ’s reign. For just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the Church is called to follow the same path if she is to communicate the fruits of salvation to men.”*

As the Church continues to actualize its mission and mandate from our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church also understands how it is confronted by the following reality as stipulated by the CCC# 854, *“By her very mission, the Church....travels the same journey as all humanity and shares the same earthly lot with the world: she is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God. Missionary endeavor requires patience. It begins with the proclamation of the Gospel to peoples and groups who do not yet believe in Christ, continues with the establishment of Christian communities that are ‘a sign of God’s presence in the world’ and leads to the foundation of local churches. It must involve a process of inculturation if the Gospel is to take flesh in each people’s culture. There will be times of defeat. With regard to individuals, groups, and peoples it is only degrees that [the Church] touches and penetrates them, and so receives them into a fullness which is Catholic.”*

Allow me to provide you with the three most important definitions of the Church as explained by the Second Vatican Council. These definitions are the accurate definitions of the Church which are in the mind and heart of the Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are:

The Church is the universal Sacrament of Christ for human salvation: This means that Christ uses the Church as his instrument of salvation; to **gather** and to **save** his people. This is why St. Irenaeus said, *“God is always at work with two hands; gathering and saving his people.”*

The Church is the family/people of God: By the very virtue of our baptism, we are all united in the family of God and therefore we are **‘the new people of God.’**

The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ: We are **‘the Body of Christ’** because in the Church we are united in the same ‘Head-Christ.’ Although we are ‘many parts,’ we are nevertheless ‘One Body of Christ’ in union with ‘Christ the Head.’ This is what we call the Mystical Body of Christ.

Further, St. Paul talks about marriage by comparing the relationship of a husband and wife to that of Christ and his Church. We see this in (Ephesians 5: 31-32). That is; **‘The Church is the spouse of Christ.’** Therefore, in this current sexual abuse in the Church, Christ will not leave us alone. We are the Church and the Church is the spouse of Christ. Christ therefore, cannot **‘divorce’** his spouse; the Church! This is why the Church has two major roles in the world; **Communion and Mission.** The Church helps to bring about ‘communion’ in the people of God so that the people of God may continue carrying out the mission of Christ.

This mission of Christ is healing, faith, hope, charity, forgiveness, truth, justice, joy, peace, love, understanding and mercy. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself confirms this mission when he tells us, *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4: 18-19).*

As we carry out this mission of Christ, it is necessary for us to remember that, we are the ‘microphone of God.’ I can’t help but just quote directly what Saint Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador says. He says, *“God’s best microphone is Christ, and Christ’s best microphone is the Church, and the Church is all of you. Let all of you, all of us live the faith intensely and feel that in your surroundings you are a true microphone of God our Lord.”*

**The ‘Church triumphant’-(the Church that is rejoicing with God in heaven),** is composed of Saints who are now enjoying God as they see God face-to-face as He truly is. This group of people are praying for us (we), who are here on earth and struggling in our life of faith. They are praying for us even now as we go through this present sexual abuse crisis in our Church.

**The ‘Church Suffering’-(the Church that is purgatory),** is composed of those who have gone before us but are in the “state” of purification so that they can enter into the glory of God. This group of people depends on our prayers (we), who are here on this earth. We do this most particularly during every Mass.

**The ‘pilgrim Church/the Church militant’-(the Church of we who are still here on earth),** is composed of all of us who are still battling with holiness and sin in this world. We continue with our faith, hope and charity through Jesus Christ. The Church triumphant which is composed of Saints in heaven prays for us unceasingly. That is why Jesus in the gospel of Luke asks all of us a very prime question, *“But when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk 18:8).*

We might be tempted to ask ourselves the following question: Why do we still remain Catholics after all these scandals? The answer to this question is that, “we are not Catholics because of moral excellence but because of Jesus Christ, the sacraments, the Saints, the Church Fathers and all the divine revealed truth contained in the deposit of faith within the One, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.” In one statement we can rightly say that, ***“We are in the Catholic Church because of Jesus and not because of Judas the betrayer!”***

**NB//** The combination of the Church triumphant, the Church suffering and the Church pilgrim is what brings about the doctrine of the ***“Communion of Saints.”***

I agree with Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark when he said, *“We have to smash the structures and culture that make abuse in the Church possible”* While I agree with all that, I must still add by saying that, *“everything or anything we can do must begin from the ‘Altar’- from prayer.”* This is the way to ‘letting light shine in the darkness and letting darkness be cast away by the light.’

As we continue clinging to Christ who is our hope and shield, we should also continue developing a deep trust in Him. Or else he will ask us like what he asked his apostles, *“Do you also want to leave?”* And our reply to this is to join Simon Peter as we respond to Christ, *“Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God”* (Jn 6: 67-69). We cannot run away from the Church. We cannot run away because of some challenges and problems in our Church because we are the Church. And Pope Saint John XXIII tells us, *“Don't be pushed by your problems be led by your dreams.”* Our dream is the beatific vision-(seeing God face-to-face). So let's keep on moving despite the struggles we face in our Church today.

Let us ask Saint Michael the Archangel to help and protect us as we work to cleanse our Church.

**Prayer of St. Michael the Archangel:**

*“Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle;  
be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the devil.  
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray;  
and do you, O prince of the heavenly host,  
by the power of God,  
thrust into hell Satan and the other evil spirits  
Who prowl about the world for the ruin of souls.  
Amen.”*

There are two types of Catholics; Mechanical Catholics and Sacramental Catholics.

**Mechanical Catholics:** They do what they do in their Catholic faith. They participate in the rituals, prayers, Mass and sacraments. However, they don't necessarily put themselves wholly, body, mind and soul into their faith. Nor do they take their faith out into the world. In times of challenges or problems in the Church, mechanical Catholics are tempted to drift off from the Church and then they abandon the Church and run away from the Church. This is what we are "**NOT**" called to be.

**Sacramental Catholics:** Sacramental Catholics on the other hand are deep Catholic individuals. They not only immerse themselves deeply with the Catholic faith and ritual, but they strive day and night to have a personal relationship with Christ and the life of the Trinity-Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They strive to live their faith in the world in their daily lives. In times of challenges or problems in the Church, sacramental Catholics decide to stay-put in the Church, they fight for the Church and they pray for the Church. This is what all of us are "**CALLED**" to be.

My sincere and deepest prayer remains....."*May our good Lord heal the wounds of all the victims and help the perpetrators to convert as they go through their soul searching. Amen.*"

We should never fear or shy away from the Church and Pope Saint John Paul II clearly encourages us by telling us that, "*Have no fear of moving into the unknown I am with you.*" Let us continue 'fixing our eyes' on Christ and raising our gaze to Christ because "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and Omega, All time belongs to him, and all the ages. To him be glory and power through every age and forever. Amen*"

While helping the world and receiving many benefits from it, the Church has a single intention: that God's kingdom may come; and that the salvation of the whole human race may come to pass. For every benefit which the People of God during its earthly pilgrimage can offer to the human family stems from the fact that the Church is "the universal sacrament of salvation," simultaneously manifesting and raising the mystery of God's love.

You will notice that, during the Catholic Liturgy on **'Good Friday,'** the Church has ten prayers to offer: for the Holy Church, for the Pope, for all orders and degrees of the faithful, for catechumens, for the unity of Christians, for the Jewish people, for those who do not believe in Christ, for those who do not believe in God, for those in public offices and for those in tribulation.

In doing so, the Church confesses its agenda: the coming of the kingdom of God. The Church also confesses a Christo-centric core; Thus, concerning Jesus, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern world (Gaudium et Spes # 45) rightly says the following about Jesus, *"For God's Word, by whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh so that a perfect (human being) He might save all (human beings) and sum all things in Himself. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and civilization, the center of the human race, the joy of every heart and the answer to all its yearnings. Jesus is whom the father raised from the dead, lifted on high and stationed at His right hand, making Him judge of the living and the dead. Enlivened and united in His Spirit, we journey towards the consummation of history, one which fully accords with the counsel of God's love: To re-establish all things in Christ, both those in the heavens and those on the earth"* (Ephesians 1:10).

My brothers and sisters, this has not been an easy writing for me. This is a big problem in our Church and I cannot claim to have exhausted everything in this writings. However, this writings can help us to focus and engage ourselves in further debates, investigations and research. Recently, we watched the world's Bishops sex abuse summit in the Vatican. It was only for three days and nothing could be concluded within those few days. However, Pope Francis gave some 'home work' to all the Bishops to go back to their respective Dioceses to discuss and to come up with concrete measures on how to deal with the clergy sex abuse crisis. Therefore, we can say that, this summit was 'the opening gate' for ongoing conversations in search for proper and lasting solutions to this great and global problem in the Church.

Let us now conclude by asking Mary the Mother of God; the Mother of the Church who is also our Mother; to continue praying for us and for our Church so that we may effectively defeat "*the elephant in the room*" which is shaking our faith.

*"Hail Mary, full of grace.*

*The Lord is with you.*

*Blessed are you among women,*

*and blessed is the fruit of your womb,*

*Jesus.*

*Holy Mary, Mother of God,*

*Pray for us sinners,*

*now and at the hour of our death.*

*Amen."*

Bye bye now from writing to you. Please now enjoy the writings of Fr. Chrysogonus and Fr. Timothy. Thank you and God bless you all!

My new address is: Fr. Isaac Mungai Kariuki, Most Holy Trinity Catholic Church, 235 N. Convent St, Trinidad, CO 81082

Yours,

Fr. Isaac Mungai Kariuki (Your former IHM Parochial Vicar)

