

Responding to Report on Sexual Abuse in PA Roman Catholic Dioceses

August 17th, 2018

Dear People of God:

In the last several days, our fellow Christians in the Roman Catholic Church here in Pennsylvania have been shaken by the revelations of widespread child sexual abuse committed over many years by clergy in that church and covered up by bishops and other church leaders. The stories detailed in the grand jury report released on Tuesday are horrific and evil, and have shaken to its core the faith of many good people who have trusted in the church their entire lives.



I ask you, first, to join me in praying for the people whose lives have been ripped apart because they were sexually abused by priests or other church leaders. In the face of the unthinkable betrayal they have suffered, may God enfold them in healing mercy and strengthen their spirits with the knowledge that they are perfectly loved. I ask your prayers especially for those victims who were so broken by the abuse they suffered at the hands of clergy and other church leaders that they have ended their own lives and now rest in God's loving arms.

Please also pray for our friends and neighbors who are faithful Roman Catholics, some of whom are now struggling with the faith they have placed in the church, and for the lay and clergy leaders of the Roman Catholic dioceses in Pennsylvania who have cooperated with this investigation and now must find ways to repent for the abuse and rebuild a more accountable, transparent structure.

In the Episcopal Church, we are not strangers to news of abuse and betrayal by our leaders. For some of us, the news of the grand jury report may have stirred up memories of our own grief and anger when we have learned that a priest or bishop we have known has abused children or been complicit in covering up abuse. For some of us who began our lives as Roman Catholics, this news may have reopened old wounds. And for some of us who have been victims of abuse, this news may trigger anger, sadness and trauma. If you find that, in the wake of this news, you would like to talk confidentially with me or with a member of the clergy about issues of sexual abuse in the church, please call the diocesan office in Northwestern Pennsylvania at 814-456-4203 or the diocesan office in Bethlehem at 610-691-5655.

The church must be a place where people can come with the deepest wounds and vulnerabilities and be safe, and our churches must be places where children are nurtured and respected and cared for and never harmed or abused in any way. As your bishop, I am deeply committed to the safety and well-being of everyone who attends our churches and diocesan programs. In recent years, our dioceses have strengthened our misconduct policies and procedures, and are places where we make every effort to deal both responsibly and responsively with complaints and allegations of misconduct. We make reports to the appropriate civil authorities when child abuse is suspected. All of our clergy, staff and volunteers who work with children are required to complete training called Safeguarding God's Children, and we follow misconduct policies based on the model policy of the Church Pension Group.

Thank you for your prayers and care for our Roman Catholic friends and family during these difficult days, and for your active involvement in ensuring that our churches are safe places for all of God's children.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a plus sign followed by the name "Sean" in a cursive script.

The Rt. Rev. Sean W. Rowe
Bishop of Northwestern Pennsylvania
Bishop Provisional of Bethlehem