



**Office of
The Archbishop**

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Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

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November 20, 2018

Dear Friends in Christ,

As you may know, last week the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) gathered in Baltimore for our fall Plenary Assembly. We looked forward with great anticipation to the opportunity to take further steps to eradicate the grave evil of sexual abuse from our Church, in particular addressing the pressing issue of bishop accountability. To that end, we planned to debate and vote on specific measures which the Executive Committee, of which I am a member, had worked diligently to prepare in the weeks leading up to the Assembly. At the last minute, the Holy See asked us to not vote on these measures, but rather to wait for the February meeting that Pope Francis has called to seek a global solution to this issue.

Naturally, our initial reaction was enormous disappointment. The abuse of young people is morally reprehensible and must not be tolerated or enabled anywhere by anyone. The pain and suffering experienced by the victims of sexual abuse cannot be diminished by mere words. Concrete actions must be taken to rebuild trust. The Catholic bishops of the United States are acutely aware of the anger and frustration of all the faithful; thus, the request to not proceed as planned stunned all of us.

As the week went along, however, some important work still took place. The bishops listened to several survivors of abuse and engaged in very direct, and sometimes heated, discussion of the issues, ultimately arriving at strong consensus and direction. This work will enable the president of the USCCB, Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, to better represent the U.S. Church in the February meeting with the Holy Father. Cardinal DiNardo will bring with him our recommendations regarding:

- A process for investigating complaints against bishops, reported through a third-party compliance hotline, by a single national commission of lay people.
- Standards of accountability for bishops.
- Protocol for removed bishops.
- National guidelines for the publication of lists of names of those clerics facing substantiated claims of abuse.
- Completion of the various investigations into the situation surrounding Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick, and publication of their results.

Of course, a bishop should not need standards of accountability or the results of a thorough investigation in order to exercise strong moral leadership and do the right thing. As your bishop, I promise to do everything in my power to ensure a safe environment for all people – children and adults – involved with any of our various ministries.

If you have followed my statements or heard my interview on Sacred Heart Radio, you know that I remain committed to vigilance and transparency on the local level and have called for the same thing on the national and universal levels of the Church. Today, our process for all employees and volunteers, including bishops and priests, includes:

- Fingerprinting and complete background checks.
- Required training on recognizing the signs of abuse and how to report it.
- Immediate reporting of any abuse allegation to the appropriate civil authorities, usually the county prosecutor, for investigation.
- A Child Protection Review Board comprised primarily of lay people.
- An active Ministry to the Survivors of Abuse.

In addition, for more than a decade, we have published the names and status of all priests credibly accused of abuse on the Archdiocesan website.

It is my firm conviction that, contrary to the headlines, we do not **have** a priest abuse crisis; we **had** a priest abuse crisis that we have taken comprehensive steps to address beginning in 1993. As of this writing, there are no active cases of clerical abuse of minors anywhere in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. If you suspect abuse on the part of any agent of the Archdiocese, please report it to the appropriate civil authorities. If you see something, please say something.

Please join me in praying for the healing of all victims of the grave sin of sexual abuse, as well as for decisive action resulting from the February meeting in Rome. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, patroness of the Catholic Church in the United States, intercede for us and may the Holy Spirit continue to guide and protect us.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dennis M. Schnurr". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr
Archbishop of Cincinnati