



August 23, 2018

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

The Body of Christ is hurting so terribly. I can't begin to imagine the lifelong pain endured by the victims and the families of those who have been sexually abused by the clergy. Just when I thought (and prayed) that new revelations of such crimes were history, news broke of the credible allegation of sexual misconduct against a Cardinal of the Church, Theodore McCarrick and the Grand Jury report from Pennsylvania was released.

Revelations about the past egregious behavior of some clergy (priests and bishops) in our Church have caused us all such great personal shame and profound sorrow for their victims. I struggle with much anger. When a cleric abuses, it is not just sexual abuse, as sickening as that is, it's also spiritual abuse, an individual is robbed of his or her faith and of sacred trust in the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. The whole Body is wounded grievously by each of these betrayals.

The continuing revelations of the fracturing of this sacred trust is paralyzing the mission of the Church. The hurt inflicted upon us in our experience of the Church can shipwreck our Christian faith. Like the corrosive nature of rust on iron, such scandal can eat away at our faith. Yet, the very fact that the Church in its current state, with her human imperfections, is a cause of dismay to some; that we are angry, disgusted, or shameful are all palpable signs that we care, that the reality of the Church matters to us, that it matters right down to our very core.

Recently, as I was reflecting on the current crisis in the Church and wallowing in in a moment of self-pity, I remembered a Christmas card I received years ago that caught my attention. There were neat personal notes on the card written to me by the children of this family. The parents then wrote about my priestly ministry, particularly about the consecration at Mass. Their teenage son told them that he really felt the bread and wine changing into the Body and Blood of Christ when I voiced the Eucharistic Prayer. That snapped me out of my pity party and reminded me what the priesthood is all about.

I'm proud to be a Roman Catholic priest. I feel humbled and so very privileged to be a priest. There's nothing in this world that I would rather be. The anointed hands of a priest are the hands that consecrate the Eucharist, the hands that absolve sin, the hands that comfort the ill and the dying, the hands that baptize and bless. If a person can feel safe and welcomed any place in this world, it ought to be in the Church under the care of her priest.

The protection of our children is paramount. Our vigilance in providing safe environments for all who come to us has not waned. The members of our diocesan lay review board have been invaluable in their frank and very insightful counsel as we continue to address this horror in our diocese. The faithful have a right to be assured that the Church has an effective zero tolerance policy that deals promptly with allegations of sexual abuse of minors by the clergy—priest and bishop. I will soon share with you a summary of our experience in reaching out to victims through our Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program as this particular program nears its completion here in the Diocese of Ogdensburg in mid-September.

Since the scandal surfaced several years ago, I have been so affirmed by the ongoing support and trust of faith-filled parishioners. The priests have a right to receive from their bishop encouragement and

support when the behavior of some causes such distress and shame for the hard working and faithful priest. Thank you for your ongoing prayers for your priests who give God's holy people a shepherd's love and care. The faithful have a right to receive an apology from the Church when sacred trust has been betrayed and that the Church is doing all within its power to prevent that from ever occurring again.

We pray for those who have suffered such heinous sinfulness by clergy as we seek forgiveness for the failure of Church leadership to address this tragedy effectively. Yes, we care and we ache for a Church that today more often puts on display its sinners rather than its saints.

What can we do? In his letter of August 20, the Holy Father asks us to consider doing prayer and penance. He wrote: "I invite the entire holy faithful People of God to a penitential exercise of prayer and fasting...today we are challenged as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit."

With this in mind, I am asking all our pastors to designate in their parishes a day of Prayer and Penance in September for the victims of clerical abuse. This could be an occasion for parishioners to come together for a special Mass for healing (*Eucharistic Prayer IV for Various Needs* is appropriate) or a Holy Hour in reparation for the sins committed against the innocent.

I invite you to join me in penance and prayer for the renewal of holiness among us. Know that this local Church continues to work hard to be rid of the scourge of clergy sex abuse and be an instrument of reconciliation and peace. God's grace will provide. That's our hope. That's our belief! God's grace will provide.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terry R. LaValley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley
Bishop of Ogdensburg