

February 16, 2019

My diocesan brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is difficult to find the right and appropriate words to share with you after hearing the news this morning from the Holy See about the removal from the priesthood of our founding bishop, Theodore McCarrick (1981-1986). My first act was to turn to the Lord in prayer, and to hold all of you there, along with all those who are survivors of child sexual abuse or harassed or abused by those in positions of authority over them. Today I am praying particularly for those lay people and priests who are survivors of Theodore McCarrick. While the news does not take away the pain these survivors have experienced, it is hopefully a further step in their healing and a statement by the Church that these crimes and sins are certainly not to be tolerated, in any way.

Theodore McCarrick will always be associated with the history of our diocese and his legacy has become one of scandal and betrayal. However, I was reminded in prayer that our diocese is not founded on Theodore McCarrick, but Christ the Lord, who renews His Church in every age. The announcement of his removal from the priesthood by the Church is a just response to the hidden destructive life that he apparently led, and a signal to the Church throughout the world that everyone in the Church is called to the integrity of the Gospel. I am grateful for the leadership of Pope Francis in acting decisively, in expediting this process and coming to this appropriate conclusion.

It is true that we all have a range of emotions in hearing today's news and although these crimes and sins seem to be decades old, as so much of what we read and hear about these days is, they still require thoughtful and compassionate recognition. I believe God is calling us to work for healing together. We all agree that any form of abuse is wrong and has no place in the Christian community. As painful as it is to face these very tragic situations, it is far better that we face it now with transparency, faith and hope, trusting in the purifying and healing love of God. Living in the light is the only remedy to overcome the darkness of abuse. I ask you to join me in turning to our faith for strength and understanding, as did our Blessed Mother when the revelation of the angel seemed beyond her capacity and comprehension. As St. Paul tells us, "We know that God causes all things to work together for the good to those who love God." (Romans 8:28)

Let us remember too, our blessing of belonging to a Church with a view of 2,000 years. Since the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first believers, up and down the ages, the Church has been beset by scandals and divisive betrayals. However, those failings do not define our Church, but rather testify to the truth that Christ continues to work through the failures by calling us all to a life of repentance and holiness; Yes, He calls all of us to reform our own lives and believe in the Gospel even while we work to prevent these failings from ever happening again. Now is a decisive time in the history of our diocese and our Church to hear His call for renewal and to be awakened in faith for sake of His mission. I am confident God, in His providence, is guiding us to a healthier new day. I recommit myself to being the Christian, priest and bishop He has called me to be, and I exhort our priests to renew their own commitment to Christ and His Church. Fidelity is life-giving in times of chaos.

I wish to state again my unswerving support and reiterate that I stand with all those who have been abused and victimized by members of the clergy. I also encourage anyone who has been harmed in any way, by any clergy in the Church, to reach out to local law enforcement and to our Victims Assistance Coordinator. I will continue to work with all my strength and all the grace God gives me to guide this local Church of Metuchen to be a thriving portion of God's Vineyard. May our work together produce a great harvest for the Kingdom of God. Know of my love and prayers for you and please – in your kindness – pray for me.

Sincerely in Christ,

The Most Reverend James F. Checchio, JCD, MBA
Bishop of Metuchen