



Our Church is working hard to confront decades of silence, secrecy and shame resulting from the sin of clergy sexual abuse. This ongoing work of the Church will help us to ensure that such horrible crimes will never again occur in our Church. We must continually strive to examine and repair the culture that allowed this sin to remain hidden, and even protected, for decades.

Our first task, the one that stands above all others, is to care for the victims-survivors of sexual abuse. It is our solemn responsibility, our duty before God, to provide pastoral care to men and women who were victimized by individuals in positions of trust - men who were charged with representing Christ. These priests betrayed their holy charge and preyed upon the innocent. Through the work of our Victim Assistance Coordinator, we attempt to reach out to the suffering victim-survivors who have come forward to share their pain.

I wish to express to these brave men and women that I am deeply sorry for the pain they have suffered. Our Church failed you. We failed to protect you as children, and in many cases, we failed you as adults. Many victim-survivors have come forward only to find the path to justice obstructed, and the truth about abusers obscured. I pledge to you that our diocese is committed to ensuring these insidious sins are not repeated.

We have committed ourselves to a thorough public accounting of the dark past. Elsewhere, on this site, you will find a list of all clergy who have been credibly accused of child sexual abuse in our diocese.

Also, we have committed ourselves to diligence on behalf of children and the vulnerable. Since 2002, we have followed strict guidelines to ensure that as soon as an accusation is received, the accused is suspended from ministry and has no access to potential victims. A single sustained accusation of child sexual abuse results in the permanent removal of the priest or deacon from ministry.

We have committed ourselves to constant vigilance. Ongoing training of both adults and children in our parishes and schools seek to make each of us an ally and protector of the vulnerable. Recognizing warning signs of possible abuse, and empowering young people to speak up for their safety and dignity, are important tasks in this outreach effort- it is a priority for our diocese.

On these pages, you will read about the care and services available to victim-survivors of clergy sexual abuse. It is my prayer that whatever care we can provide will assist in the journey toward healing.

I am grateful to victim-survivors who have come forward and allowed us to provide help as they courageously have shared their traumatic stories so as to ensure that no child will ever again have to experience. If these brothers and sisters had kept quiet, we would still be in an environment of shame, silence and grave sinfulness. It is because of their fortitude and courage that we are able to begin the work of atoning for our sins and seek the healing *mercy* of God.

As your bishop, I offer my prayers for all the victim-survivors of clergy sexual abuse, and will always seek to build a Church in which all of God's children are safe, secure and protected.

In the Peace of Christ,

Bishop Cotta