



A message to the faithful of the archdiocese from Archbishop Michael Jackels

24 August 2018, 10:26 AM

**Reflecting on the way forward in light of sexual abuse crisis, prayer service
Sept. 14**

The Least there be any confusion or wonderment...

What is what

Let us be clear: sex abuse of minors by clergy is a grave sin against the Sixth Commandment of the Decalogue, a crime against the law of the Church, and a crime against the law of our land.

What is truly at issue here is the abuse of a minor (both male and female) whose innocence and purity should be protected, not violated. Sexual abuse of a minor harms not only the victim, but also family members and friends, and it scandalizes Church members and others.

Only God judges, but the sin of sex abuse of a minor would seem to merit the punishment that Jesus spoke of for harming a child: to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around one's neck (see Luke 17:2).

Who did what

It is with shame and sorrow that I acknowledge that in the past some priests here did this, and that it was sometimes not reported, and that some people in supervisory roles did not respond appropriately.

I cannot say enough times or with adequate contrition how sorry, how so sorry I am that this happened.

Only a small number of clergy is responsible for the sin and crime of sexual abuse of minors. The majority of clergy is good, and try to imitate Jesus, the Good Shepherd of souls; they should not be the object of our suspicion.

With regard to people in supervisory roles, for a long time their response was driven by the general consensus in society at the time, which was that someone guilty of such behavior could change. And so the priest was sent to some sort of treatment, and then to a new assignment.

It was later learned that nothing short of a miracle could change such behavior, and so there would always be a degree of risk that the priest would offend again. We can't allow that to happen. No more.

The way forward

Learning the true nature of the behavior and the appropriate response to it led then to a new approach, for example:

- All allegations of sex abuse of a minor are reported to civil authorities.
- All allegations of sex abuse of a minor are referred to the Archdiocesan Review Board to determine if further investigation is warranted.
- Anyone found guilty of sex abuse of a minor will be removed permanently from ministry.
- Victims are invited to meet with the bishop, and resources are made available to promote the healing and wholeness of victims.
- All seminarians, deacons, priests, bishops, Church employees and volunteers must undergo a criminal background check and safe-environment training.
- All candidates for Holy Orders must also undergo a psychological evaluation and numerous interviews.
- Great care is taken regarding the education and formation of candidates for Holy Orders.

And in response to the most recent scandals, there is understandably a call to add holding bishops accountable for acting according to this protocol, with the consequence that he would be removed from office if he doesn't; makes sense.

Where to focus

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews exhorts us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith (see 12:2).

We need to focus on Jesus, and not so much on the institution of the Church, which often leads to concern about numbers, finances, image, reputation, and a hankering after power, privilege, and perks.

No, we fix our eyes on Jesus, and on imitating his mind and heart, which should lead to the practice of humility and charity, pardon and service.

We need to show by our words and our witness that, after being fed the Eucharistic food, we become what we eat and drink, that like Jesus we live to give pardon and service to others, regardless of who it is, whether the other person is deserving, asks nicely, is aware of the cost, or is grateful.

Conclusion

I hear the anger. I share the shame. I feel the pain. But for me, my pain and shame won't make me stop my walk with Jesus, or my identity with the Catholic Church, or my ministry. Jesus, the Church, or Holy Orders aren't the cause of the sex abuse of minors, nor does that sin and crime take away from their truth, beauty and goodness.

I don't know what else might reasonably be done to promote healing, to protect people from the harm of sexual abuse, and to restore trust, or what we might do differently and better. I would be open to hear ideas that I would be able to act on.

One thing we can do is respond to the invitation of our Holy Father Pope Francis to practice penance and prayer. These, he says, are a means to many good ends, for example: reparation for the sin and crime of sex abuse; spiritual medicine for things

like lust or the thirst for power, which are often the root of other evils; to open our eyes to the suffering of others; to ensure the end of any form of abuse; and to fix our eyes on Jesus.

I am committed to do this. And just as a priest in Confession imposes a penance on the penitent, maybe victims of sex abuse by clergy here might want to impose a penance on me.

Finally, on 14 September 2018, at 7:00 pm, in the Cathedral of St. Raphael, I will lead a service of lament. The purpose will be to acknowledge guilt for sin, say sorry, and even be so bold as to ask pardon from God and others. At the end, I will consecrate our archdiocesan Church family to Mary, asking her to pray for us and to form us as followers of her son, Jesus. The service is open to the public, and it will be live-streamed as well.

May Jesus have mercy on us and help us.

Michael Jackels

Archbishop of Dubuque