



## DIOCESE OF PORTLAND OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

December 15/16, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Quickly we are drawing near to Christmas. I hope that this season of Advent serves as a reminder to you and your loved ones that the light of Christ is always with us. Jesus is Emmanuel, God-with-us.

In November, as I departed for the Plenary Session of the Bishops' Conference (USCCB) in Baltimore I wrote to you summarizing the agenda for the meeting and asking for your prayers. The central focus of the meeting was to be devoted to a response to the ongoing crisis in our Church created by the misconduct of some bishops who themselves were involved in immoral conduct, or who failed to deal effectively with issues related to the crime of the sexual abuse of minors. I also shared with you the many positive steps that our diocese has taken over the last two decades to promote a safe environment in all of our churches and schools:

[www.portlanddiocese.org/sites/default/files/files/BishopParishLetter18\(1\).pdf](http://www.portlanddiocese.org/sites/default/files/files/BishopParishLetter18(1).pdf). I am truly grateful for the many people who have helped to make this a reality in the Diocese of Portland. It is our vigilance together that is our best way of creating a safe environment.

Following the Thanksgiving holiday, I have resumed meetings with different groups in the diocese. Questions have been asked of me concerning the bishops' meeting and my own feelings about the events that transpired. At the suggestion of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, I would like to give you an update on where we stand. Particularly important in reporting on the meeting was the request which came from the Holy See representing the will of Pope Francis, which asked the bishops to delay voting on the new proposals that had been worked on since the crisis began in the summer. We were asked to postpone voting on any resolutions until Pope Francis meets in Rome with all the leaders of each Bishops' Conference in February. The Holy Father would like to discuss, according to the Vatican press releases, "the prevention of abuse of minors and vulnerable adults." As best I understand the matter, the delay in voting was requested because it was feared that the action of one group of bishops could interfere with the efforts of the larger (or universal) Church.

To be perfectly frank, my first reaction on Monday morning when this was announced was one of great dismay and disappointment. Under the leadership of Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, the president of the USCCB, however, the agenda of the meeting progressed as planned. We were able to establish a series of action steps for Cardinal DiNardo to deliver to the Holy Father at the February meeting. The steps include (1) establishing an independent process for investigating complaints against bishops reported through a third-party compliance hotline, (2) finalizing both the *Standards of Accountability for Bishops* and the *Protocol for Removed Bishops*, and (3) supporting the timely completion of the various investigations into Archbishop

Theodore McCarrick and publication of their results. Of course, the American Bishops have already published the *Charter for the Protection of Children* and the *Essential Norms* in 2002, which have helped enormously in assuring our churches are safe environments. As Cardinal DiNardo stated at the end of the assembly, "We leave this place committed to the strongest possible actions at the earliest possible moment." For this, I am thankful. What began as a moment of great disappointment, in the grace of God, became a moment of hope. We continue to move forward resolved to do what is needed to address the issues before us. As requested we did not vote on the documents, but we had robust discussions and revised the work that had been done. We will return to these action steps at our June meeting.

As I pass on to you this update, I also want to thank you for your continued presence in our parishes, even as we, together, are disturbed by the disheartening news of serious problems in various places in the Church. The Eucharist, the Mass, is the place where we gather. It is there that we encounter Jesus, who gives meaning to our lives. Jesus calls us to pray together in community and he promises to be with us. The very celebration of the Eucharist reminds us that we need each other. We are strengthened by each other in our faith through this common prayer. I know that I am strengthened in my faith by your fidelity to yours.

Join me, then, in sharing the Advent hope that draws us to Church. We make it possible as a community to celebrate as Jesus has called us to do and, at the same time, together, our continuing vigilance will ensure that our Church remains safe in Maine.

In the coming week we will have the opportunity for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. *The Light is on for You* in all our parishes. Through the sacrament, we experience God's mercy, our sins are forgiven, and we are healed. It is a wonderful way to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord Jesus. I encourage all of you to take this opportunity to experience the mercy of God. And, as you do, pray for the healing of the Church. Pray especially for the victims of sexual abuse. Pray as well for our priests, who serve us so generously. May God, in his great mercy, show us the way.

With a promise of prayer, and asking the same, I am

Sincerely yours in Jesus, our Light,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert P. Deeley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. To the left of the signature is a small, simple cross symbol.

Most Reverend Robert P. Deeley, J.C.D.  
Bishop of Portland