



DIOCESE OF BUFFALO
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

August 21, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ -

As you have no doubt seen in recent news reports, the window that was opened to allow individuals seeking civil justice and restitution by asserting claims in the Diocese's chapter 11 proceeding, or initiating lawsuits against other Catholic entities, due to past experiences of sexual abuse as allowed for by New York's Child Victims Act, has now been brought to a close. You may also be aware that the Diocese of Buffalo has had an extraordinary number of claims from individuals who assert that they were abused, in most cases decades ago.

I wish to make abundantly clear that I regard this as a tragedy of truly epic proportions and, as I have maintained since day one as bishop of the Diocese of Buffalo, it is of paramount importance to deal with the Church's obligations to survivors forthrightly and to work to repair the enormous damage that has been done not only to the reputation of the Church here in Western New York, but most importantly to the lives of those affected. Toward that end, we are fully focused on fulfilling what this process is all about, namely bringing about a sense of restitution, closure and healing for those who were abused by members of the clergy.

The process now continues and will likely be a lengthy one as we work through the chapter 11 process with the court-appointed committee of abuse survivors. We will also be working with the various insurance carriers of the Diocese as we address the financial implications of these many claims. Throughout this process, we will seek just treatment for all survivors while also ensuring, as much as possible, that dedicated Church funds are directed for the purpose they are intended - sustaining the work of evangelization and ministry across Western New York.

Because the Diocese is currently in chapter 11 reorganization, the resolution of survivor claims will ultimately be incorporated into and implemented as part of an overall reorganization plan, which may require another year or more to finalize. There are many complex issues involved which must be addressed and the terms of the plan must be voted on by survivors and other creditors before it can be approved by the Federal Bankruptcy Court. Essential to approval is that the Court finds that the plan treats all abuse survivors and other creditors of the Diocese fairly and equitably.

My reason for communicating with you on these matters has everything to do with my view that as the Catholic faithful of Western New York, we are very much a family that must face its challenges together with candor and with as much transparency as we are able to provide. The well-being and healing of those who have experienced the evil of abuse at whatever stage in their lives are rightly the concern of us all. These are not merely words but a mandate derived from the very Gospel of Jesus Christ. We must go to whatever length is required to demonstrate genuine remorse for what these sisters and brothers have endured, and for how their tragic experiences have affected them throughout their lives and impacted their relationships with others, and most especially with God. I regard it as an essential part of my ministry to be available and to meet with any person who has been harmed; to listen; to express my own helplessness to erase the pain that afflicts them through no fault of their own; and ultimately to appeal to the all-encompassing and unconditional love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to provide comfort and bind their wounds.

For our part, we have implemented rigorous policies and protocols to ensure safe environments for our young people and utmost accountability among clergy, bishops, lay employees and volunteers for how we conduct ourselves and deal with violations of our strict code of conduct with the severity that is warranted. To be clear, there is zero tolerance for any act of sexual abuse toward a child or other vulnerable person, or any act of sexual harassment toward an adult.

It is my hope and fervent prayer – and I know the hope and prayer of all of you – that we can begin to move forward and ultimately bring to a close this very painful and sordid chapter of our Diocese's history. The truth is, each and every day so much tremendous good is accomplished by our Church and those who live faithfully and conspicuously Christ's Gospel of compassion and service. Basic human needs are being met in ways that restore dignity and hope for those who simply need a helping hand. We are educating the minds and souls of our young people as we prepare them for a lifetime of learning and discernment. We extend critical care to the sick, and comfort and companionship to the elderly. We provide pathways to those whose course has been altered by addiction and influences that for a time has obscured their true potential. We give shelter to those without a home of their own, or a place of refuge for those in dire circumstances and with nowhere else to go. This is what our Church is all about, and the work motivated by Catholic faith that must preoccupy us all as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Please know that we will communicate further with you as the process of resolving the claims of those who seek justice continues and as we progress toward our goal of emerging from chapter 11 stronger, more focused, determined, and more dependent on one another.

You can be assured that I give thanks and praise to our loving and gracious God each morning and each night for the opportunity to serve you as your pastor, your shepherd and brother in Christ. I have full confidence that we are indeed on the road to renewal and that the faith which unites us will neither be obscured nor diminished by past failings we resolve never to repeat.

Thank you for your constant prayers, for your faithful witness and for your unwavering devotion to the Lord who is the source of our strength and our light in the darkest of nights.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

+ Bishop Mike