



CARDINAL RIGALI CENTER
20 ARCHBISHOP MAY DRIVE
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63119
P) 314.792.7841
F) 314.792.7842
WWW.ARCHSTL.ORG

ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

December 5, 2018

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Church speaks of Advent as a season of hope. Saint Augustine once said: “Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are.”

That kind of hope is exactly what we need this year, in the wake of the revelations of sexual abuse by Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, and the decades of abuse by priests and cover-up by bishops detailed in the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report. Such abuse and cover-up has been repeated in many places, in many times and as former papal nuncio Archbishop Viganò’s message made clear, on many levels of the Church. Taking Christ at his word (“Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me”) we might say that he has been crucified again. It’s bad enough that he was crucified in those who suffered sexual abuse. What’s worse is that he was crucified by bishops and priests who valued something more than the Gospel – committing sexual abuse, enabling sexual abuse, and turning a blind eye to sexual abuse.

I apologize. I am called to represent the Universal Church in this time and place, and this is the first thing I want to say to the local Church on behalf of all priests and bishops: I apologize to those who have suffered sexual abuse at the hands of the clergy. I apologize to those who suffered from the Church covering up the abuse. I apologize to all people whose faith has been shaken by this behavior. The situation calls for repentance, reparation, and new structures of accountability. Let me say a word about each.

Repentance can only come from those who committed the sins. That’s one of the central rules of the sacrament of reconciliation: no contrition, no absolution. Priests, bishops, and cardinals committed these sins. Priests, bishops, and cardinals must express sorrow, confess their sins, and do penance. They should be held accountable in the courts of human justice; they will be held accountable in the court of divine justice.

Reparation, however, is where I need to ask for your help. I know it’s not fair to ask for your help. But the simple truth is that while priests and bishops alone created this mess, priests and bishops alone can’t clean it up. I believe Jesus showed us that the innocent can help make up for the sins of the guilty. I know that we, the clergy, need your help. Can you say a prayer for a victim of abuse, or make some small sacrifice to help them deal with their pain, or perform some act of service to the vulnerable, or offer your expertise in helping us create new structures to prevent abuse? When one part of the body fails, another part has to pick up the slack. With deep humility, I ask for your help.

In terms of new structures of accountability, I don’t yet know what those will be. Have we taken many steps in the Archdiocese of Saint Louis to ensure, as much as we can, that such abuse and such covering up cannot happen here? Yes. But is it enough? Obviously not. Now is not the time to celebrate what we have done. Now is the time for the cleansing of the Temple. So, in this season of hope, I ask you to lend

me your anger. Lend me your courage. Lend me your prayers, that I may be as creative and determined as I need to be as I work with many people to clean the Lord's house.

Trust in Church leadership has been badly wounded by these events, and rightly so. It needs to be rebuilt by concrete actions, not just words. So I want you to know that I invited the Attorney General of Missouri to review the files and procedures of the Archdiocese pertaining to sexual abuse. I did so because Church leadership needs to be, and I am willing to be, transparent and accountable. I have had and will continue to have conversations – as will all bishops around the country – about what further structures might be needed. Bishops need to do the hard work of overseeing the change that's necessary to address the problems that have come to light. But we'll need the help of many lay people to do that. The investigation by the Attorney General is a first step in that direction.

Saint Gregory the Great once said: "It is better that scandal should arise than that the truth should be suppressed." I agree. Scandal has erupted. And the fundamental reason is not that the media is out to get us. The fundamental reason is that sins – and crimes – have been committed. The fundamental reason is that the Church needs to be purified, beginning with priests and bishops.

In this season of Advent, there's no better place to turn than our blessed Mother – even and especially in a year of scandal. Mary watched as the Apostles abandoned her Son in the hour of his crucifixion. She welcomed them back when they had repented and helped them become instruments of the Gospel again. So I pray, and ask you to pray with me: *Mary, mother of mercy, help us by your prayers. Help bishops and priests to repent, to return to Jesus with a purified faith, and become instruments of his salvation.*

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name "Robert J. Carlson".

Most Reverend Robert J. Carlson
Archbishop of St. Louis

To report any suspicion of abuse by any Church personnel please contact local law enforcement, or call the Missouri Department of Social Services Child Abuse Neglect Hotline Number: 1-800-392-3738. In addition, anyone who has knowledge of sexual abuse or misconduct by a member of the clergy, an employee or volunteer of the Archdiocese of Saint Louis is urged to call the Office of Child and Youth Protection at 314-792-7704.

For more information on how the archdiocese is responding to the current abuse crisis please visit: <https://www.archstl.org/promise>