



National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People

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Special Report of the National Review Board to the Body of Bishops on the Sexual Abuse Crisis in the Church

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November 13, 2018

Good morning your Eminences and your Excellencies.

For many years, you, along with the clergy, religious, and laity of your dioceses, have toiled to extinguish the fires of the sexual abuse crisis. Those efforts have not been in vain. Thanks to your commitment to prevent abuse and support survivors, dioceses today are not the same ones in which occurred the horrific abuses detailed in the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report. The efforts of your dioceses, as well as the implementation of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, have successfully addressed many of the problems of the abuse crisis.

Nonetheless, your response to this crisis has been incomplete. Specifically, current events reveal a continued lack of transparency about past cases of abuse and the way they were handled, as well as a lack of accountability for bishops.

The Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report exposed the fact that some bishops have not been sufficiently open and transparent. It has taken the intervention of the state and the media to fully expose the darkness of abuse in our dioceses. It is shameful that the sin of abuse was hidden and allowed to fester until uncovered by the secular world. Even more unbearable is the fact that so many innocent children and young people suffered because of the inaction and silence of some bishops. You must put the victim first when allegations come forward. How many souls have been lost because of this crisis?

Today, the faithful and the clergy do not trust many of you. They are angry and frustrated, no longer satisfied with words and even with prayer. They seek action that signals a cultural change from the leadership of the Church. Their distrust will remain until you truly embrace the principles of openness and transparency listed in the *Charter*. You must come to terms with the past. There cannot be reconciliation without full acknowledgement of the truth.

While regrettably you will not be taking any action this week, the National Review Board (NRB) still stands behind the recommendations I am presenting to you today, and which you have received as a handout, as you consider how you must act when you are permitted to do so.

To bring about transparency, the NRB recommends that as soon as possible, you state your intentions to conduct a review of your diocesan and seminary files, especially archives and clergy personnel files dating back to at least 1950, if possible, and share the findings with the public. At minimum, the findings should include a list of clergy who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults, and whether those cases were handled appropriately by bishops and their dioceses. To maintain credibility, the review process must involve the laity in some form, such as a diocesan review board or external firm.

Some of you have already conducted reviews and published lists of offenders or have expressed your intent to do so. Some of you have also invited your state's Attorney General to conduct reviews. We are grateful for your proactive steps to restore credibility. Your actions are true marks of the leadership the Church so desperately needs. Unless it would interfere with a civil investigation, we strongly recommend that all other bishops follow suit.

Beyond transparency, current events also reveal a lack of accountability for many bishops for their role in the abuse crisis. While much of the guilt has been placed on priests, bishops have often escaped punishment. Simply, the accountability of bishops has never been fully addressed. Full accountability of bishops requires at least two concrete actions: investigating allegations involving bishops, and ensuring consequences for bishops who have failed in their responsibility to protect the vulnerable.

In August, Archbishop Vigano released his testimony regarding the events surrounding the abuse committed by former Cardinal McCarrick. His testimony, along with other public reports containing additional allegations and settlements, seem to suggest that those at the highest levels of the hierarchy remain immune to the consequences of their actions that allowed abuse to occur.

Archbishop Vigano's allegations must be addressed. No stone must remain unturned. Ignoring these allegations will leave a cloud of doubt over the Church, as questions will linger. To that end, the NRB supports the USCCB's call for a full investigation, involving laity, into the many questions surrounding Archbishop McCarrick. Such an investigation by a lay body must be independent if its findings are to have credibility among the faithful and society in general. The NRB is again grateful for your leadership regarding this matter, specifically those of you who have publicly supported such an investigation. The NRB calls on the archdioceses and dioceses of New York, Newark, Washington and Metuchen to cooperate with any future investigation.

The NRB also supports the concrete recommendations proposed by Cardinal DiNardo to bring about bishops' accountability by establishing a 3rd party reporting system for allegations against bishops, addressing restrictions of bishops who were removed or resigned due to allegations of sexual abuse or harassment, developing a code of conduct specifically for bishops, and the establishment of a lay commission.

To further create a system of accountability, the NRB also recommends that the *Charter* be revisited in light of current events. During the most recent process to revise the *Charter*, many of the recommendations of the NRB were not brought forward. These recommendations should be re-considered, as well as the inclusion of bishops in the *Charter*. Going forward, the abuse of power, manifested in sexual abuse committed by clergy, including bishops, against adults must also be addressed.

To ensure the *Charter* is being implemented effectively, the audit process must also be strengthened. Currently, the bar for achieving compliance with the *Charter* is low. Both the type of audit being carried out, as well as the audit instrument itself must be changed, ensuring that the audit is more than simply a compliance review. The audit must also include a review of parishes and Catholic schools to ensure that the data they submit is accurate.

Finally, as more information is publicized regarding the inappropriate handling of abuse by bishops, it remains clear that some bishops have escaped the consequences of their acts of

omission regarding abuse, and that little is being done to address this injustice. While most of you have responded appropriately to allegations of abuse, according to a recent report by the Boston Globe and Philadelphia Inquirer, more than 130 bishops – or nearly 1/3 of those still living have been accused during their careers of failing to respond to sexual misconduct in their dioceses. Others have been accused of committing abuse. Few have faced real consequences. This must change.

This lacuna must be addressed either at the national level or through an appeal to the Holy See. Indeed, through his *Motu Proprio*, *As a Loving Mother*, the Holy Father Pope Francis, stated that a bishop “can be legitimately removed from this office if he has through negligence committed or through omission facilitated acts that have caused grave harm to others, either to physical persons or to the community as a whole...”

At present, the NRB is unaware of any mechanism that has been utilized by the USCCB to hold culpable bishops accountable for their past action or inaction. Possible mechanisms could include barring guilty bishops from USCCB membership or attending national meetings. The NRB is also unaware of any sense of meaningful fraternal correction among U.S. bishops regarding matters of abuse. The NRB calls for a revision of the Statement of Episcopal Commitment to include a concrete approach to fraternal correction.

Fraternal correction that is meaningful and effective requires that bishops appeal to the Holy See to intervene if a particular bishop appears unable or unwilling to act in the best interests of the entire Church, whether in the past or the present. One plan of action could be for the USCCB leadership to submit a request for the Holy See to review its own files concerning any sexual misconduct or cover-up involving bishops.

On September 19th, Bishop Robert Morneau, retired bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay, took full responsibility for his failure to prevent abuse and asked to withdraw from public ministry, stating his intentions to spend his time in prayer for all victims of sexual abuse and perform corporal works of mercy as reparation for his failures. A grand jury report or canonical proceeding did not force him to withdraw. He did so because his conscience dictated such action.

Bishop Morneau’s actions exemplify those that some of you must take to restore trust and allow the deep wounds caused by the current crisis to heal. We know this will be difficult but it is necessary to restore trust and reconciliation with survivors of abuse. May God give you the courage, humility, and fortitude to do the right thing for the sake of his Church.

Your Eminences and your Excellencies, may God bless you as you continue to fight the fires of abuse in the Church, and extinguish all sources of this crisis that has caused such harm and devastation of souls. More than new national policies and procedures, it will be your individual decisions and actions, with the support and involvement of the laity that will ultimately restore the Church and bring healing and justice for survivors of abuse.

Reflecting upon a time of chaos and unrest in the Church and the world, the recently canonized Pope Paul VI once wrote that the smoke of Satan had entered the Church. What came after, he wrote, were not sunny days, but “days of clouds, of storms, of darkness, of searching, of uncertainty...”

Years later, his prophetic voice so aptly applies to the failure of leadership that enabled abuse in the Church and the crisis we face today.

Allow me to assure you that the NRB remains committed to fulfill its charge to assist you and accompany you during this difficult moment so that the Church may emerge purified and renewed for the sake of our children and young people.

Thank you.