

Updates from Fr. Phillip

It has been a while since I've written a bulletin column. I have much to say so please bear with the length.

News Regarding Church Leadership

As I begin my comments about recent revelations regarding Church leadership and the sexual abuse crisis, I genuinely ask your patience because I don't have the perfect words to express all that I am feeling and need to say. I'm angry and still processing the pain you and I are both feeling, but as your pastor I feel I need to share my thoughts with you, though they are incomplete at this moment.

I am speaking to you about this in this venue, rather than in my homilies, for several reasons. First, I cannot address this in a way that is appropriate for children. Second, as important as this matter is, many in our parishes are facing personal issues such as deaths, financial stress, and other difficult family issues which are at the forefront of some of your minds. And third, I am blessed to know several clerical abuse victims who are heroically working to re-embrace the Church. They have asked to be able to continue the healing of their wounds in a manner that does not include revisiting their pain at Mass where they come seeking a new path with the good news of the Gospel and the Eucharist.

Why Are We Talking About This?

The very troubling issue of abuse of minors by priests came to light in 2002 when the *Boston Globe* detailed the scope of clerical abuse and the failure to report clerical abuse in the Archdiocese of Boston. Soon it was revealed that numerous other dioceses, including the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, faced credible abuse cases. Sadly, the sinful ugliness of clergy abuse has returned to the forefront of our awareness with two recent revelations.

First: Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, former Archbishop of Washington D.C. until his retirement is accused of abuse of a minor in New York. McCarrick is the most prominent American cleric to be accused of abuse. When this allegation was deemed credible (and is now being investigated by the Holy See), it was revealed that McCarrick also had engaged in homosexual advances against a number of men, including several seminarians, over a long period of time; rumors to this behavior had circulated for many years. In light of this information, questions have emerged as to how McCarrick was promoted through the hierarchy of the Church.

Second: The Attorney General of the State Pennsylvania released a grand jury report detailing allegations of abuse against more than 3,000 individuals, mostly minors, by a number of priests in Pennsylvania, and the failure of some bishops to protect children from abusers. Most of the abuse occurred many years in the past, but the details and scope of the allegations reveal criminal and moral atrocities that are sickening to read.

Recent Historical Background, and Where We are Now

In reaching out to a few parishioners, I am reminded that not all of you were old enough to recall the events of 2002 when the Catholic Church first confronted this very troubling sin, and the changes that were already taking place prior to 2002, and afterward, to address this issue.

Most of the clerics credibly accused of abuse were ordained before the late 1970's, before changes I detail below were being implemented. As of today, many are dead, some are in jail, and all others were removed from priestly ministry and/or returned to the lay state. Nonetheless, the abuse they committed are grave violations of civil law, but also grave violations of moral and ecclesiastical law, and have been for the whole history of the Church. Described as "delicts [crimes] against the sixth commandment," these delicts encompass any kind of offense against the dignity of the human person and sexuality, especially relating to clerics. The primary tools in the 20th Century for addressing allegations were the 1917 *Code of Canon Law*, a 1962 document issued by the Holy See, and the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* (the current law in the Church). In the 1990's the Church in the United States requested from the Holy See more efficient and aggressive measures to deal with allegations against clerics. Consequently, more aggressive measures were implemented against abuses.

Here in Milwaukee, already in 1989, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee started Project Benjamin to care for abuse victims' spiritual and human needs. The work of Project Benjamin includes financial compensation.

At the Holy See, Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI changed the Holy See's procedures to more efficiently address abuse incidents, including expediting the process of removal from the clerical state when appropriate.

In the 1980's-1990's, seminary formation underwent significant changes, including measures to assess individuals with potentially unhealthy human formation issues. Admission to seminary began to include, and still does include, rigorous independent psychological testing, for example. I am one of several interviewers for men applying to seminary in Milwaukee. The men who come to my office, along with being holy and good men, almost all have had extensive life and work experience, including having dated women before applying to seminary. Today, seminaries, including our own, include a very detailed and thorough examination of one's entire life and background, includes the professional input of many, and are quick to say "no" if there are any questions about a candidate's background.

In 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in light of the national press coverage revealing the abuse of minors by clerics, passed the "Dallas Charter," a statement of ecclesiastical responsibility for these issues. Additionally, the "Essential Norms" was passed, which is the governing law in the United States requiring, among other things:

- Mandatory child protection training for all employees and volunteers in any Church or school setting, and mandatory background checks updated every five years.

- A formal and swift process to remove any cleric from ministry with a substantiated allegation of abuse. Victims' Assistance Coordinators are employed in every diocese to assist victims in reporting and support.
- A national and diocesan review board consisting of professionals from law enforcement, legal, social services, and psychological communities to evaluate child protection policies and all past and present individual allegations.

There is much more to the charter and essential norms (updated as recently as 2018), but the result was a total overhaul in the handling of allegations, including the immediate removal of a cleric upon receipt of an allegation pending an independent investigation, and the immediate reporting to and cooperation with civil law enforcement authorities. All of these policies are carefully followed at Christ King Parish as well as other measures to ensure safety and transparency. All office and classroom doors at Christ King have windows on them, and volunteers and employees are trained to not be alone with minors. These procedures, while often customary for many years, became mandated and universal in 2002.

There is well-documented evidence that these changes have helped. While one incident of abuse is too many, reported incidents since the 1990's are exceptionally low. Today, there are no clerics credibly accused of abuse in any priestly ministry. This, however, always comes with the reminder that many victims take many years to report their abuse.

The Church's efforts to protect our children have made headway. The Pennsylvania grand jury report held up current Church procedures as a model response to abuse allegations and child protection. Even some of the Church's strongest critics recognize the Catholic Church's vigilant efforts and resolve as other organizations, such as gymnastic and scout groups, cite the Church's response and procedures in their efforts to address the issue of abuse against minors, which is a serious societal problem.

Although significant strides have been made, our vigilance must never waver. An open and unresolved issue since 2002 again has come to the forefront. The changes made by the Church after 2002 focused on priests, deacons, and parish employees, but did not adequately address the problem of bishops who neglected their responsibilities. Bishops report to the Holy Father, so the issue of a bishop's failure to report abuse or to adequately protect a minor is dealt with directly by the Holy Father who appoints, removes, and disciplines bishops. The two most recent revelations (McCarrick and Pennsylvania) point to the Church's urgent need to address this area of concern.

Reactions

There is no easy way to explain sin and evil. I am angry that I, along with you, work so hard to be, and form, disciples of Jesus Christ, do good in the name of the Church, and yet the crimes of some individuals cause legitimate questions and mistrust. I don't have perfect answers as to what is going on, but here are some of my initial observations:

- This is a spiritual challenge for all of us. Those who live the faith well, who love God and love God's Church, who try to understand and follow the Church's time tested teachings, and who pray and are humble to the daily presence of God in their lives, are happy and healthy individuals.
- Abusers, and those who were complicit, have turned away from the teachings of the Church, they have neglected any sense of a conscience, and they have completely disregarded the Church's challenging but livable teachings on chastity and healthy human sexuality. These crimes of abuse and neglect are the result of evil; evil that demands justice and must be cast out of the Church. There has always been sin in the Church, but this situation differs in that it involves a complicity to and acceptance of sin. Grave violations of trust and looking past continued sin results in long term consequences for us all. It is an act of charity when we call others from sin to conversion, hating the sins that are committed, and placing ourselves and others at the mercy of God.
- We must acknowledge distorted teaching and acting out on human sexuality. In misguided attempts to be relevant, pastoral, and merciful, and in our efforts to avoid offending, we have become comfortable with sinful and unhealthy sexual behaviors that are wreaking tremendous human devastation in our world. I strongly urge you to read the statement by Bishop Robert Morlino, of Madison, which I support. Among other very honest points, he names particular truths in relationship to homosexuality which we must face as we engage in discussions regarding homosexuality.¹ In his words, "To call it anything else would be deceitful and would only ignore the problem further."
- Abuse of children and vulnerable people takes place in all parts of society and we need to hate this behavior wherever it occurs. The Church is a representative of the general population and the sins and illnesses that are present. The revelations of the abuse of Larry Nassar and young gymnasts is disgusting, the scouts have had to confront this issue, it is present in public schools, in other religious communities, in the medical profession, in Hollywood, and in families (8 of 10 abuse incidents occur with someone known well to the victim, and this often includes family members). If it hasn't come up in some other area of your life, it will. The lives of victims are gravely harmed and they deserve our care and attention. We need to focus on this issue not just in the Church but in all areas of life.

What to Do

The recent revelations are an electric shock that has prompted me to evaluate my call to holiness, and I hope it will do the same for you. Again, I don't have comprehensive suggestions, but here are a few thoughts.

- Pray. When we consistently and authentically speak to God in prayer, we more closely understand His vision of good and evil, and more powerfully share His mercy with others. For your own struggles, I recommend praying over the Psalms. Many of the Psalms powerfully express human questioning and despair, yet always trust in the presence and rescue of God.

¹ The statement is available at <http://www.madisoncatholicerald.org/bishopsletters/7730-letter-scandal.html>

- Except for abuse victims themselves, we need to engage in the powerful spiritual weapons of reparation and fasting for the Body of Christ. This is a good time to learn more about these practices and to begin them immediately.
- Stay focused on the Gospel. Satan draws us away from God when we allow the sins of some to turn us away from God's gift of His Church here on earth, and her mission.
- Don't allow evil to weaken your discipleship and mission. This has been our project here at the parish and I hope you will continue to grow as Jesus' holy disciple. The only way the Church and the world will become a better place is through our perseverance as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Boldly hate sin. Honestly acknowledge the ways you've compromised to sin or have become complacent to sin.
- Always seek and engage in closer union to Jesus Christ—yours and others.

Relationship to the Church

I urge you not to generalize your anger against *all* priests and bishops as if they have all failed the Church. Some did, and their failures are inexcusable, morally reprehensible, and often criminal. But please do not blame the Church or every priest and bishop. Most, while imperfect, are faithful, good, and holy, men who are sickened by the sins of others.

I encourage you not to change how you think about supporting the Church. Some feel this is a way to express their anger. But halting financial gifts to the archdiocese or the parish simply slows down the immeasurable work that is done in the name of the Church. Like any institution, changes in revenue result in pay cuts and layoffs for teachers and staff, less tuition assistance, decreased charity through the Church, neglect of our spaces, etc. Withholding support does not help victims, penalize perpetrators, or send a message that leads to anything helpful.

The sins of abuse are not because of the Catholic Church, but precisely because people violated the expectations of the Catholic Church. This is the result of sin, a failure in prayer and holiness, a neglect of the Church's teachings on sexuality, a neglect of the concrete reality of evil, a neglect of the responsibility that lays with shepherds, and a disregard for the dignity of the human person, especially the most vulnerable whom the Church always regards with a mother's care.

There have been a variety of reactions to the Church's crisis of abuse. "Walking away" from the Church is not a solution that leads to any good. One may have justified anger and desire to express this option, but that doesn't make it right. Abandoning the Church is a victory for Satan who desires to divide and weaken God's Church. Under no circumstances can we allow this to happen.

Within the life of the Church, the greatest periods of holiness, growth, and renewal followed periods of purification. This time of purification is leading us to a more holy and focused Church that will be ever more faithful to her head and founder, Jesus Christ. You have an important role to play in rebuilding the Church; do not walk away from this responsibility. The old adage is wise, "If you find

the perfect church, it will become imperfect the moment you join, as we are all imperfect human beings.”

Conclusion

This is the time to pray. Pray for all who have been abused at the hands of anyone, especially priests, deacons, bishops, other religious, or those who work for the Church. And please pray for your priests. It is painful to be associated with such evil. I have always wanted to be in parishes with schools, as I love the hope and joy of children and the role a parish plays in forming them as disciples. To even contemplate someone harming a child is repulsive in a way I can't describe. It is troubling for me to see you suffer as faithful Catholics who place trust in the Church's ministers. For what some of the Church's priests and bishops have done, I am very sorry.

Fr. Will and I live at the Christ King parish rectory, which can be like a fishbowl, but is also good as our whole life is transparent to staff and parishioners. You see us around the community and we are part of your lives. At the parishes, we work on a healthy understanding of shared governance. No major decision is made without broad consultation and knowledge. Know that your trust in us as your parish priests is not misplaced, but also constantly verified by the many others with whom we collaborate.

This has been a difficult time to be a priest when trust, which is challenging to earn, has been broken. It is so hard to again face the disgusting crimes and neglect of the past, especially as our two parishes move forward to answer God's call to missionary discipleship. Most of all, I feel extremely pained seeing you suffer, the people I am ordained for, and love to serve.

As Jesus' disciples sat in their storm tossed boat on the Sea of Galilee they became afraid as Jesus slept in the boat. Seeing their fear, Jesus called them to faith and calmed the stormy waters. When we experience our boat rocking because of uncertainty, fear, or doubt, take this as an opportunity to re-establish your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus who may seem distant or even sleeping but will not let us sink, and will bring us calm (Mt 8:23-27).

Ten Year Priestly Ordination Anniversary: A Brief Reflection

Speaking of priesthood, I was ordained a priest on August 1, 2008 in Milwaukee. While I was away this summer, my ten-year anniversary of priestly ordination passed, on August 1, 2018. I am very happy to be at this point and look back on ten years of blessings. This summer also marked five years as pastor of Christ King and three years as pastor of Saint Bernard.

This is where I feel called, to serve as a pastor, and I am grateful to be in this role today. Thank you for your support of me at these wonderful parishes. We don't serve for praise, but your support really does help me enjoy and grow my priesthood more and more every day. I am extremely lucky, truly lucky, to be assigned to parishes with such good people.

The priesthood is challenging and exciting and there are men in our parishes who are called to this vocation. Please pray and practically support those of your family and friends who may have a calling.

Auction "Raise the Paddle" Proceeds and Sound Systems

Thanks to those of you who added a little (actually, a lot) extra to the "raise the paddle" appeal at the 2018 parish social and auction. The funds raised were earmarked for new and upgraded sound systems in various parts of the parish. This work was completed, under budget, over the summer.

The parish center dining room now has a sound system that will help during presentations and meetings, and the aging and failing system in the North Hall was replaced. Both of these will be used frequently. The Church sound system was upgraded from an analog to digital system. Our vendor affirmed that the speaker system in our church is still very adequate and still has a number of years of life. An alternative may require a series of speakers drilled into the marble along the walls, and this is not a desirable option, in my opinion.

The digital upgrade allows for a new level of adjustments and troubleshooting, as well as expansion, should we ever desire to do so. This upgrade also allows us to loop the organ loft sound system into our main system. I hope you have already noticed the improved musical acoustics and a clearer sound all around. Please be patient as this new system still needs a lot of tuning as we test it in different environments. Our church's size and domed ceiling create complex acoustical characteristics, and they change significantly based on temperature, humidity, and congregation size. Thanks for your support in this important upgrade that touches on the heart of our parish, the Sunday Eucharist.

"Living the Call, Sharing God's Gifts" Capital Appeal

This fall we formally undertake a capital appeal. You are seeing the second of three newsletters in the bulletin this weekend. During much of September and October, we will be inviting you to prayerful reflection as together we work to ensure a strong future for the Church through our home parish. Our time of prayerful reflection will include homilies, a video, and some words from parishioners. I think you will enjoy this time of reflection.

It has been ten years since the parish undertook a major appeal — this is a long time to go without significantly investing in our parish's future. I hope you have noticed that in the last five years we significantly cut fundraising requests and there have been no second collections for parish purposes. With that in mind, as we embark on this appeal, I ask you to reflect on your life at Christ King Parish, and I hope you will very generously respond to the campaign in a planned and prayerful way.

The appeal is about our people and our mission to the Gospel. When structural issues in our aging campus arise, a successful appeal will ensure that resources available for salaries or outreach will not need to be diverted. If our appeal is successful, another shouldn't be necessary for a number of years. We probably cannot wait another ten years, but it won't be tomorrow that I ask you again to make a

rare and sacrificial investment. I plan to give sacrificially to this appeal, an amount that will require forgoing purchases for at least several years. I will never ask you to do something I am not willing to undertake myself.

One reminder that this appeal will be combined with our normal annual stewardship renewal. One form will be used. Please keep that in mind, that your gift to the appeal is a one-time gift in addition to your normal parish support.

All of your previous giving data, as well as your gifts to this appeal and annual stewardship, will be kept absolutely confidential and not shared with the steering committee or other volunteers. Contributions will be handled by only a small number of staff who absolutely need the data for processing purposes.

A lot of work has gone into ensuring your funds will be used well and effectively. Please watch the opportunities to pray, and to learn more and ask questions. Thanks to appeal executive team: Mike and Karen Bressanelli, Jim and Sharon deGuzman, Andreas and Michelle Klotz, Joe and Katie Pickart, Peter and Erin Stanek.

Continuation of Canon Law Studies

This summer I completed the third year of studies for the Licentiate degree in Canon Law (JCL) at Catholic University of America, which the Archbishop has assigned me to obtain. Thanks for your patience in my summer absences. With Fr. Dennis Saran, and Fr. Will, and our excellent staff, things ran smoothly.

I had four classes covering rather technical issues, and I don't pretend they may interest you. But people need this knowledge to help those in leadership effectively dispense the spiritual riches of the Church in a just and efficient manner. I have a very taxing online class this fall (Matrimonial Jurisprudence: the evaluation of marriage nullity requests), and another one this spring. On top of this, I need to start writing my thesis, which will be due at the start of June. So, this will take continued time and energy. Next summer I will return for classes and start preparing for comprehensive exams. If I keep up, this should be done by the end of 2019, nine months earlier than planned upon starting the program.

Congratulations on making it to the end of this note! Keebler's Frosted Animal Cookies was my reward after finishing it.

And, see you at Mass.

Fr. Phillip