



Crisis in the Church

Where We've Been – And Where We Are Today

The wounds caused by sinful and criminal clergy to innocent minors are open and festering, and there is no one more troubled or angry about the contents of the Pennsylvania report than I. The actions of the priests offending minors in the report are criminal as well as sinful. The most honest and credible approach of our Church's leadership at this point is to apologize and acknowledge the evil, as I did in my video and written messages. We are all repulsed and upset at what has happened in our Church.

In 1992 I graduated from canon law school and came home to the beginning of the abuse of minors crisis. Since that time I have met with victims and heard the deep hurt and trauma they have experienced. Striving to make sure this never happens again I have been a part of creating the first Safe Environment Protocols in my home Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. I also have had to investigate allegations of misconduct through the years and directed the laicization process that resulted in permanently removing clergy offenders from the clerical state.

Once again, the gut-wrenching Pennsylvania report has re-opened painful wounds. I accept its data as accurate and am grateful for those who did the critically important work of processing and compiling it. However, I believe there is a context to the data which emerges in the report that needs to be grasped as well as a fact-based review of where the Church—and especially the Diocese of Tucson—has journeyed, most especially in these last 15 years.

An initial fact revealed clearly in the Pennsylvania Report is that of the 301 perpetrators, only **two** are from the last ten years! This mirrors our experience here in the Tucson Diocese. We have no known allegations of sexual misconduct with minors against any of our priests in active ministry today. The vast majority of allegations in the Pennsylvania report are from decades ago—a time frame in which our secular culture experienced the so-called “sexual revolution” and assured us that sexual acts had little intrinsic meaning. This is reflected in the John Jay Study, an extensive review of sexual misconduct in the church conducted in 2004 and 2011. The damage left in the wake of that so-called “sexual revolution” is intense. Nevertheless, the conclusion drawn by some is that the Pennsylvania report is an accurate snapshot of the Church

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today. I do not find that in the report. In outlining my impression of where the Church is today, and especially our Diocese, I will do my best to stick to facts.

Crimes cannot be treated in the same manner as sins. Crimes must be reported to the police for investigation and potential prosecution. In May of 2002 Bishop Manuel Moreno of the Tucson Diocese and Barbara LaWall, Pima County Attorney, entered into an agreement regarding the handling of allegations of sexual abuse of minors by members of the clergy within the Diocese of Tucson in Pima County. It remains in force. It requires all clergy and employees of the Diocese to report any suspected child abuse to the Pima County Attorney's Office and is sent to the appropriate county within the boundaries of the Diocese of Tucson. Moreover, any allegations of sexual abuse of minors reported directly to the Diocese are required likewise to be forwarded immediately to the Pima County Attorney's Office which is then sent to the appropriate county and the appropriate law enforcement agency. The agreement likewise holds the Diocese to full participation and cooperation with any police investigation undertaken. For the past 15 years, this collaboration has been maintained. Diocesan officials have always reported allegations concerning clergy or lay ministers/volunteers to the County Attorney's Office, regardless of the statute of limitation. The process includes reporting all allegations, allowing the investigations to occur without any interference and then adhering to the civil processes and outcomes. Our Director of the Office of Child, Adolescent and Adult Protection has maintained this working relationship with the assigned Detective from the County Attorney Office with whom we have immediate access.

1. All of our parishes and schools have an assigned Compliance Officer who is the local liaison for the Office of Child, Adolescent and Adult Protective Services, and who serves as the local gatekeeper for the pastor. The critical role that these individuals are responsible for includes helping to manage the clearance process of each volunteer and employee, maintain records for each parish/school regarding training of the Safe Environment Program, and evaluate the individual compliance plans along with on-going review of their Standard Operating Procedures. Safe Environment Protocols, including the background checks, fingerprinting, etc., apply equally to me (Bishop Weisenburger), Bishop Kicanas, seminary candidates, our priests and deacons, employees, and volunteers. There are no exceptions. There are voices in the media which assert that our *Safe Environment Protocols*, published extensively on our diocesan web page are ineffective and merely hoops for the laity to jump through, who haven't caused the problems. The data disputes this assumption entirely:

In the last ten years (counting only from 2008) we have undertaken **38,558 clearance requests** covering all those serving in our parishes and schools. **754 (2%) were rejected** due to one of the following categories: (a) **sexual misconduct**, with categories that include sexual assault, sexual harassment, prostitution, or boundary issues; (b) **violence**, with categories that include domestic violence, assault, disorderly conduct, criminal damage, and child/vulnerable adult abuse; (c) **narcotics**, with categories that include possession for sale, drug paraphernalia, and drug trafficking; or (d) **other**, which include DUI, chronic alcoholism, theft, and falsification of application. Those who are cleared for work or ministry with minors must undergo an annual update course of instruction

and attest to that training. Each applicant, every five years, must go through a recertification of clearance. Our procedures are aggressive, for which I do not apologize. The issues are too grave.

In a recent review for this article, our Diocesan Human Resources office did a quick review of their data and determines that since 2008, twelve persons (1.5%) had their clearance rescinded due to later allegations of sexual misconduct; and a total of ten parish or diocesan employees were terminated (1.3%) due to later allegations of sexual misconduct. It likewise is widely presumed that some persons with criminal or other problematic backgrounds are choosing not to present themselves to work or minister around children, knowing that their background would become known through the background checks and safe environment procedures.

In addition to background screening, all priests, deacons and those working in our parishes and schools take part in Safe Environment training conducted by our Office of Child, Adolescent and Adult Protection, assuring that all serving in the Diocese understand clearly their responsibilities to keep children and vulnerable adults safe. Children in our parishes are also given lessons on proper boundaries and what to do if they are mistreated. In my years of diocesan leadership in Oklahoma and Kansas I was a witness to vastly increased reporting to police and Department of Human Services, in large part due to children speaking up, and almost entirely about what was going on in their homes.

I believe that data reveals that our protocols in place are a strong reason why the numbers of allegations of misconduct dating to the last 15 years have dropped so drastically. My conclusion is echoed by Thomas Plante, PhD., professor at Santa Clara University and Adjunct Clinical Professor of psychiatry at Stanford University. In an article he published for *Psychology Today* (not a Catholic publication), available on their web site, he notes that the incidents of clerical abuse since 2002 are “down to a trickle.” He points out that the Dallas Charter and subsequent church reforms have resulted in “[...] a number of industry standard and even ground-breaking policies and procedures to keep children safe in Church related activities and keeping abusing priests out of ministry.” He concludes “Things are very different in the Church post 2002 than before 2002, and the outcome in terms of new cases is proof that these measures are working.”

2. Our parishes are now separately incorporated and each has a Board of Directors. Each Board of Directors meeting includes a requirement for the Pastor to respond to the question “Is the parish/school in full compliance with the safe environment program?” His response is recorded in the minutes of the meeting. It is noteworthy that there are two lay persons who are required members for each parish board of directors and there must be at least two board meetings per years. The Diocese sends an internal auditor to each parish approximately every 18 months. The audit includes not only financial and human resources matters but also an audit of parish compliance with the safe environment program.

3. Every allegation of sexual misconduct with a minor is reviewed by our Diocesan Review Board. Board membership for our Diocesan Review Board includes a Police Captain, a psychologist, a clinical social worker, an attorney, a parish priest, and several others with professional backgrounds. The vast majority of the Board membership are laity (not clergy) and not employed by the Diocese of Tucson. Moreover, our Diocese is independently audited each year by an external, out of State auditing firm with expertise in auditing the actual implementation and function of our policies and procedures. The audit typically involves interview with a sampling of Board members as well as diocesan personnel responsible for our Safe Environment Protocols. The audit instrument is extensive, time-consuming to prepare, and carefully vetted. We have always enjoyed a positive rating for compliance.
4. In the Diocese of Tucson, we regularly encourage victims from the past to come forward. This happens periodically through diocesan parish bulletins, our diocesan newspaper, and our web page. The full-time Diocesan Director of our Office of Child, Adolescent and Adult Protection holds a Master's degree in counseling and a Ph.D in education. She coordinates our victims' assistance program in collaboration with the clinical department of Catholic Community Services. Counseling is offered to anyone who has alleged sexual abuse by clergy or church personnel. Bishop Kicanas, our retired Bishop, always offered to meet with victims as I have in my previous diocesan assignments. Here in Tucson I have met only once with a victim who came forward concerning an allegation from the distant past. Bishop Kicanas also was one of the leaders in our nation in publishing the names of clergy who had been credibly accused of misconduct. That approach remains our policy.
5. Of special pain to me is the fact that our U.S. Government reports that currently one in five females is sexually assaulted prior to her 18th birthday, as are one in twelve males. The overwhelming majority of sexual abuse of minors is committed by persons known to the child or family members and the horrific violence and crime they experience still goes largely unreported or under-reported. The numbers are mind boggling and I am appalled at what appears to be a profound lack of interest on the part of the public. Sexual abuse and misconduct in the Church is the tiniest tip of the iceberg that is sexual abuse in our nation today. It is my hope that with no lessening of the spotlight kept on the Church and its sins and failings, an equally bright spotlight will be focused on this massive evil of sexual abuse of minors in our culture—largely outside our Church. The multitude of children being abused outside the Church deserve the same level of safety, response, and care as those in our churches and schools.
6. The Church's response in the past was inadequate, misguided, inept, and failed the victims in most every way. The Church of more recent years has a zero-tolerance policy that holds perpetrators and their enablers far more accountable. Sadly, I cannot help but conclude that the horrible sin of the Catholic Church in the middle and late 20th century is not that we dealt with sexual abuse of minors differently from the rest of the world. Rather, the horrible sin of the Catholic Church is that we dealt with sexual abuse of minors exactly the same way the secular world and other institutions dealt with it. We should have been better than everyone else's response. We were not. In the past we

denied, covered up, remained silent, underestimated the damage to victims, underestimated the danger of offending priests, did not report to police, and offered little or no real help to victims. Despite some notable exceptions, that approach in the Church largely ended more than fifteen years ago. I would note that over 35 years ago I studied psychology on the undergraduate level as well as classes on the Master's level. Pedophilia was never mentioned! In the intervening years our Church, along with western culture, has come to understand far better the intense damage inflicted by sexual perpetrators of children as well as the high potential for re-offending and the limitations of therapy (contrary to assurances from psychiatrists and psychologists in the distant past). My hope is that the rest of our culture will eventually deal with this crime as well as the Church does today. When that happens all the children of our nation will be in a far safer place, not just those in the Church.

7. The Diocese of Tucson has been blessed with the involvement of countless lay men and women who assist me and our pastors in the mission of the Church. There is a perception that the laity, especially women, have no voice or serious leadership role in the Church. I would humbly note that in the Diocese of Tucson the following are all female: the Chancellor; the Superintendent and Associate Superintendent of Catholic schools; the Director of Communications; the Director of our Office of Pastoral and ministerial formation (forming parish lay ministers); the diocesan finance Controller; the Chairman of the Diocesan Finance Council; the Executive Director of Catholic Community Services; the Associate Director of Human Resources; the Director of the Office of Child, Adolescent and Adult Protection is female. This list could be extended. I note this only because the perspective that females have no voice or strategic role to fulfill in senior leadership in our Church may play well in the popular imagination but it is not found in fact. Laity fulfill an indispensable role in our Diocese. Moreover, I fully endorse the actions being discussed around the Nation concerning the establishment of better procedures to report any criminal or negligent actions of bishops—a matter which definitely will require lay leadership.

I realize some people don't want to hear these facts and may choose to interpret them as denial of our sins or deflecting attention away from the Church's horrible sins and crimes of the past. That is not accurate. Again, I fully accept the accuracy of the Pennsylvania Report as a true and factual snapshot of the Church at a given period in time — a time in which we regrettably mirrored the failures of the rest of our culture and its institutions. But in the same manner, I think it is only accurate that we acknowledge that the data does not show this to be who we are today, and it is most especially not an accurate representation of the Diocese of Tucson today.

There have been voices calling for the termination of donations to parishes and/or the Diocese. I have no doubt that people will follow their conscience. I believe, factually speaking, that the massive improvements made to ensuring the safety and security of children in our Church would never have happened without diocesan leadership, programming and funding. The programming, record-keeping, and oversight is simply beyond the average parish's ability to accomplish this critical task on its own. To cripple our Diocesan Safe Environment staff as well as Catholic Schools Leadership, Personnel department (which works largely with parish personnel), communications, seminarian education, or procedures for inviting international priests (who staff approximately 1/3 of our parishes), strikes me as a response that may satisfy on the emotional

level but fails as a constructive response to the Church's sins of the past. Understandably it may not be evident to the average Catholic in the pew, but the complexity of employment laws as well as matters pertaining to insurance, financial oversight, school leadership, construction projects, lay ministry formation, deacon formation, and so much more have all resulted in the diocese being required to take on an ever-larger share of what used to be handled on the parish level. The notion that we can wound the Diocese without it having repercussions on the parishes is unrealistic. While it may satisfy on the emotional level, the collateral damage to the parishes and finally the people in the pews leaves me to hope that cooler heads will prevail.

Again, I am deeply sorry, especially to the victims of abuse in the Church who deserve our every assistance. I likewise apologize to the good Catholic people who suffer over this festering wound. I likewise feel deeply for our good and faithful priests who continue to provide their generous ministry in circumstances none of us envisioned years ago when we made our way to the seminary. Those of us who did not create these problems but are left to address them will need the support that I believe your prayers will bring.

At the end of the day, ours is the Church of Jesus Christ. It is not my Church, any particular Cardinal's Church—not even the Pope's Church. Ultimately it is *our* Church, for together we are the Body of Christ and as promised by the Resurrected One, the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I admit that there are days when the netherworld appears to be winning but I would urge you in the Spirit of Christ to keep the faith. Allow no human failings, weaknesses, sins, or crimes to diminish your ability to still find Him in Word, Sacrament, and Community.

May God bless you abundantly.

+Edward J. Weisenburger