



DIOCESE OF METUCHEN

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

September 8, 2018

Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I know that so much of the news regarding the Church this whole summer has been painful and very difficult for all of us. The bad news seemingly does not end. However, I write to you in order to hopefully be a voice of encouragement amidst the discouragement and a ray of light in what may seem endless dark clouds. My hope is to provide some assurance to you that indeed our diocese continues to seek to be in the light regarding clergy misconduct, and remain poised to respond in goodness and truth to whatever is placed before us.

New Jersey Attorney General Grewal announced through a September 6 press release that he is forming a task force to investigate allegations of sexual abuse by members of the clergy within the Catholic dioceses of New Jersey, as well as any efforts to cover up such abuse. According to the press release, the task force will conduct a comprehensive review of existing agreements between the Catholic dioceses of New Jersey and state law enforcement in order to examine the Church's compliance with established reporting procedures and cooperation with law enforcement and to determine whether any additional action is necessary. This has not been unexpected in the wake of the public disclosure of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report.

While the Diocese of Metuchen has not yet received either a subpoena or indeed any communication from the state, the New Jersey bishops intend to cooperate fully with the investigation. As you may know, each bishop in the state signed back in 2002 a Memorandum of Understanding with the Attorney General. It is heartening for me to be able to say to you that the Catholic Church in New Jersey does much to protect children and will remain vigilant to ensure the safety of every child we serve.

As I have shared with you previously, the Diocese of Metuchen in 2002, underwent a thorough audit of all the files of the priests of the diocese, much like what the Attorney General is now asking of us again. It was conducted by an outside law firm and our diocesan chancellor. The diocese turned over to law enforcement every alleged case of sexual abuse or misconduct we had at that time, including cases that pre-dated the founding of our diocese in 1981. Since that time, it has been our practice that the Diocese of Metuchen has turned over to the County Prosecutor's Office every single reported claim of sexual abuse or misconduct. In addition, we have sent them to the Attorney General's Office as well. We will again present this information to them as soon as they request it.

The Diocese of Metuchen maintains our longstanding agreement with law enforcement and our shared commitment to pursue truth and justice in all matters brought forth regarding the abuse of a minor by clergy, no matter the length of time that has passed since the alleged actions occurred and no matter the rank or status of the person accused. I am grateful that the processes the Church has in place regarding child sexual abuse here have been shown to work, since the last case of reported abuse of a minor in one of our parishes was two decades ago. We need to stay ever vigilant in our continued efforts.

In addition to this reporting protocol, the diocese provides training and background checks for all those working with youth in our diocese. The diocese continues to urge anyone who has been abused to bring the situation to the attention of law enforcement officials and stands poised and ready to help.

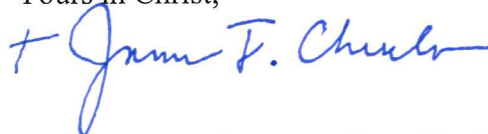
I know that it can be wearisome to continue to hear of this topic of abuse and scandal; however, my desire to share this update with you is that you too will have a more complete picture of what news outlets are reporting. As your bishop, I believe it is important that you know how seriously I take our current situation and indeed want to work for healing, truth and hope.

This Friday we celebrate the Triumph of the Holy Cross. This liturgical feast reminds us that going through suffering provides the pathway to ultimate glory. Let us keep in our prayers all who have suffered from abuse in any way that they may find the healing and peace that they deserve. May God transform their suffering through the mystery of the cross. I have asked each parish to have its own prayer service to pray for victims of sexual abuse on September 14, the Triumph of the Holy Cross. I firmly believe that to stand under the Cross of Christ, is the ideal place for us to find the understanding that the world does not provide and the strength to carry our own cross with courage.

Please continue to pray for me in my call to lead our beautiful Church of Metuchen; you are all a blessing to me. May our Lady of Sorrows, who knew the suffering of Her Son so personally, be our guide and comfort through our difficult walk now. Know of my ongoing gratitude and love for you, and my prayers for you, and I ask that you remember me in your prayers too.

With renewed best wishes, I remain

Yours in Christ,



Most Reverend James F. Checchio, JCD, MBA
Bishop of Metuchen