

Be Not Afraid

Bishop John M. LeVoir's Monthly Column

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THE WOUNDS CAUSED BY ABUSE

by Bishop John M. LeVoir

The recent revelations concerning Archbishop McCarrick and the clergy of Pennsylvania have once again opened the wounds caused by sexual abuse in our country. These wounds have been inflicted most devastatingly on those who were abused by clergy. I apologize to those who have been abused by clergy in any way. I ask for Jesus' healing for you.

Wounds have once again been opened in the Body of Christ, his Church. The Church is reeling from this recent wave of revelations. Trust has been diminished in the leadership of the Church. Many are wondering how sexual abuse could happen in the Catholic Church and how it could be allowed to go on, despite the knowledge of the hierarchy.

There are wounds in the local Church. None of us is left untouched by these scandals. Everyone is hurt. "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it" (1 Cor 12:26).

From September 9–20, I am leading a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and will dedicate this pilgrimage to the healing of the wounds of sexual abuse. As a member of the Church hierarchy, I will do prayer, fasting, and penance in the Holy Land at all of the holy sites, especially at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (Monday, Sept. 17). It is this church that houses both the site of the crucifixion of Christ and the site of his resurrection.

The laity did not cause this scandal in the Church and they have every right to be angry and disheartened. However, I would ask that in solidarity they join with me in prayer, fasting, and penance from September 9–20 asking Our Lord for healing of the wounds caused by the sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy and the negligence of the hierarchy to stop such abuse.

Please note that the Diocese of New Ulm, along with dioceses throughout the United States, has enacted policies to address sexual abuse in Church ministry and to help ensure safe environments for children and youth. I recognize this as my responsibility, not as a one-time obligation or as a set of requirements to meet, but as a commitment to answer the call to protect all God's children and firmly establish a safe environment throughout Church ministry.

Hope and Healing

In the summer of 2017, the diocese sent a delegation to the Convocation of Catholic Leaders in Orlando, FL.

The delegates brought back to the diocese various ideas for evangelization initiatives. One of the initiatives was to offer a prayer service and adoration for hope and healing for those wounded and in need of physical, spiritual, or emotional healing.

Two such prayer services have already occurred in the diocese. On June 22, a Prayer Service for Hope and Healing was held at the Church of the Sacred Heart in Murdock followed by a Mass and prayer service for healing held on Sept. 7 at the Church of St. Peter in St. Peter.

Pope Francis has pointed out numerous times that we are all wounded in some way or ways. We all need the healing touch of Christ. He is the one who can heal us spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

Chapter 11 Reorganization

The diocese is continuing to work together with the attorneys representing the victims of sexual abuse by clergy and the insurance companies for the diocese to resolve the claims and thereby allow the victims and survivors to receive compensation for the pain and suffering that they are experiencing.

Pastoral Planning

As I have said and written numerous times, the diocese has undergone a significant change from the time of its founding in 1957.

Technology has had a tremendous impact on farming and family life. Farms have gotten larger and families have gotten smaller. The population is declining. Our priests are assigned to multiple parishes instead of just one priest per parish.

It is clear to many that sooner than later our smaller parishes will no longer be able to sustain themselves and our priests will be unable to minister to the current number of parishes. It is imperative that the diocese must plan now for the future and not be caught in a crisis.

Our smaller parish congregations are asked to pray and discuss their future in an honest way with their pastors. Some of the smaller parishes in the diocese have merged into larger ones. The smaller and larger parishes together as one can provide more comprehensive services, such as catechesis and Catholic education. A larger congregation offers the opportunity for a more robust liturgy.

Catechized in the parish and energized through the celebration of the Eucharist, parishioners are called by their baptism to go out to the peripheries to evangelize.

I ask that we all work together to “right-size” the parishes in the diocese to face the future with renewed energy. Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us.