

## **A letter from the Supreme Knight about the sexual abuse crisis**

August 21, 2018

Worthy Chaplains and Dear Brother Knights,

The issues that have come to light concerning sexual abuse by Archbishop Theodore McCarrick and in the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report are cause for grave concern among Catholics and Brother Knights. Many feel deeply betrayed by those whom they long held in high regard. Such concerns are shared not just in the United States, but in Europe, Latin America and elsewhere.

These sins of commission and omission have sent the Church we love, the Church we serve and the Church that Jesus Christ established into convulsions. Sadly, the disgrace not only is borne by the perpetrators, it hurts us all, as does the silence of shepherds who have ignored the cries of their flocks.

There are many wonderful and faithful laborers in the vineyard of the Lord among our priests and bishops. However, it is clear that in addition to devastating criminal acts, we have seen many other moral failings by clergy that represent a crisis of commitment to the Gospel.

Too often the needs of victims have been subordinated to a distorted sense of mercy toward the perpetrators or an instinct for clerical self-preservation. The sexual acts — both criminal and non-criminal — highlight the need to recover a respect for and a renewed commitment to the priestly promises of celibacy.

The Knights of Columbus has supported the pastoral and charitable work of our bishops and priests since our founding by the Venerable Father Michael McGivney. We understand that the priest should lead the parish and the bishop should be the center of unity in a diocese. But we — like all Catholics — are painfully aware of the wreckage that ensues when elements of this leadership are abdicated by evil actions whether directly perpetrated or covered up.

Now, the Knights of Columbus — laymen, priests and chaplains together — will have an important role to play in rebuilding the Church. We must commit the Knights of Columbus to work for repentance, reform and rebuilding of the Church.

Repentance should include a full accounting of the misdeeds by those who have committed them. Archbishop McCarrick and others at fault owe us a full account of their actions, motivations and cover-ups. After years of having us confess to them, it is now time for them to come clean about what they have done and what they have failed to do.

This will also help increase the recognition that clerical sexual abuse is a global problem that must be addressed at the highest levels of the Catholic Church. Moreover, priests and bishops who refuse to live according to their promises of celibacy should be removed from public ministry, not out of retribution, but for the protection of the faithful and to prevent future variations of the scandal we now suffer.

Reform must include many good ideas that have been proposed, such as a full and complete investigation of sexual abuse led by an independent commission that includes laity; complete transparency by the Catholic hierarchy into all matters of criminal sexual misconduct past or future; an expansion of the zero tolerance policy to include sexual activity or misconduct by clerics including bishops, and by seminarians; and a call for faithfulness by all members of the clergy, including bishops. There must also be an independent ethics hotline for reporting of criminal and other conduct at odds with Catholic teaching on the clerical state of life; and there must be protections against retaliation.

Such reforms will be difficult for a Church largely unused to them, and we must support our bishops and our priests in embracing these reforms in order to rebuild.

We can help to rebuild our Church in several ways. Above all else, Knights — and our chaplains — must embrace love of God and love of neighbor. This is Christ's great commandment and the founding mission of our Order. It is also exactly the opposite of the rejection of God and exploitation of neighbor that our Church has witnessed in these scandals.

Shortly before becoming Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger decried the "filth" in the Church "even among those, who in the priesthood, ought to belong totally" to Christ. He also provided the antidote, stating at other times that what the Church needs now more than anything else is "saints." Pope Francis reiterated Pope Benedict's sentiments in his letter on Aug. 20.

In the days ahead, the Knights of Columbus will help renew our Church on a national level through a Novena of Masses in reparation for these sins that have so grievously wounded the Body of Christ. I take this opportunity to ask that you offer this Novena of Masses for our Church at your earliest opportunity.

Beginning in November, the Knights of Columbus will sponsor, in cooperation with the Shrine of St. Jean Vianney in Ars, France, a national tour of the relic of the heart of this great patron saint of priests. In the coming weeks, I will share more details with you about this initiative.

We will also continue to strengthen and rebuild our Church at the level of our families and parishes through our Building the Domestic Church program. Its twin elements of imbuing families with faith and strengthening parish life are critical to providing a Catholic Church that rebuilds based on the Gospel principles of love of God and love of neighbor. Together with our recently announced "Faith In Action" initiative, we will strive to make our parishes truly become, in the words of Pope Francis, "a family of families."

Now is the time for all brother Knights to stand steadfast in faith, as Catholics and as gentlemen. We will assist priests, bishops and our fellow Catholics in helping the Church chart a course for the future that puts Christ at the center, so that truly we may say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

This is the moment in which Knights — including in a special way our priest members — can be part of a great renewal for good in our Church. And as we strive to follow the Lord more closely in the days ahead, may he deliver us from every evil and in his mercy graciously grant his Church peace and unity.

In closing, know that your faithful witness and sacrifice can bring inspiration and hope to millions of your fellow Catholics. It will be needed in the days ahead more than ever before. And to every priest and bishop whose commitment and dedication to our Order and to our Church has been faithful and exemplary, please accept my gratitude in both a personal way and on behalf of the Knights of Columbus.

Let each one of us prayerfully invoke the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, so that in the words of St. Maximilian Kolbe, our hearts would be cleansed and themselves become immaculate, similar and like unto her own heart.

Fraternally,

Carl A. Anderson  
Supreme Knight