



ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD
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HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT
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OFFICE OF
THE ARCHBISHOP

August 20, 2018

Dear Brother Bishops, Priests and Seminarians of the Hartford Archdiocese,

Once again the grave wounds of sexual abuse have been reopened for us all as a result of the Pennsylvania grand jury report and the resignation from the College of Cardinals of the former Archbishop of Washington, Theodore McCarrick, as a result of the allegations made against him.

The anger and disillusionment of our Catholic people is only matched by my own, and no doubt yours as well. After all the massive effort that has been made since 2002 to rid the Church of this evil and to try to bring healing to victim survivors, how is it possible that we find ourselves confronting the same perception of the Church, and of us as priests and bishops, as if nothing has changed?

The Pennsylvania grand jury report, as devastating as it is, ostensibly covers a seventy year period, and is largely about a past that we have striven mightily to remedy. However, the allegations against the former Cardinal have to do with seeming indifference to repulsive conduct not only before, but also after, the great reforms and commitments that followed 2002. Whether before or after, it must be asked how he could possibly remain in ministry, and once the answer is known, steps must be taken to ensure that it will not happen again with any Bishop.

Notwithstanding all that has been done to bring prevention and healing since 2002, all of us have to be scrupulously proactive in the practical order by following all the safeguards that have been set in place to ensure a safe environment for minors, vulnerable adults, and really everyone.

But what is most essential is our spiritual vigilance over ourselves and one another when it comes to any conduct that is a betrayal of the priesthood entrusted to us for the care of Christ's flock. To live a "double" or secret life sexually in serious sin with or against another, is to betray not only the priesthood but the people who have trust that we, on becoming clerics at diaconal ordination, "believe what we read, teach what we believe and practice what we teach." Christ's words about the millstone (Mt. 18:6) and about Judas (Mt 26:24) are a clear warning of the seriousness of scandal and betrayal. Sins can be forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance, but only when there is sincere contrition and a firm purpose of amendment. And if someone is given to behaviors that betray his priestly ordination, then he should seek help, and if he cannot commit to doing so, then he ought to seek voluntary laicization.

My brothers, these words are meant for myself as well as for you. Indeed, they are even more dire a warning for me as a bishop. Like you I feel the shame and spiritual dejection, as well as anger, at what has happened to victims and to all the faithful as a result of sexual abuse and depredation and the failure of some bishops to definitively remove clerical predators. I am also concerned about the integrity of seminary formation as evidenced in some recent reports of which I am aware.

At the same time I want to acknowledge publicly the moral integrity and dedicated ministry of the overwhelming majority of priests, including the priests of our Archdiocese, past and present. Thank you for dedicated priestly ministry in such challenging times.

We are all in this together, and I would like to devote some time to hearing from you on these matters. It is also my intention to discuss this with both the Presbyteral and Pastoral Councils at their next meetings. And if you have anything you would like to share with me personally, the door, as I have often said, is always open.

In the words of Pope Francis, “May the Holy Spirit grant us the grace of conversion and the interior anointing needed to express before these crimes of abuse our compunction and our resolve courageously to combat them.”

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Leonard P. Blair". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair
Archbishop of Hartford