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Archdiocese Charts New course to Combat Sexual Abuse of Children

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BALTIMORE – Echoing the words of St. Francis de Sales to call the sexual abuse of children by clergy “the spiritual equivalent of murder,” today, Cardinal William H. Keeler announced that the Archdiocese of Baltimore is charting a new course in dealing with the crisis facing the Church – to protect children, to restore trust and to begin healing.

In a letter to the Archdiocese’s 180,000 registered families, Cardinal Keeler wrote:

“... The simple, painful truth is that the Church did not go far enough to protect children from sexual abuse. After much reflection and prayer – and following a thorough review of our records, going back decades – I have decided that we must be more open and transparent in our efforts to eradicate this evil within our Church. Therefore, we are making public an accounting of priests and religious men who have served in the Archdiocese and have been accused of child sexual abuse. We also are releasing an accounting of the funds expended as a result of this issue.” He continued: “..... Rather than shrinking from facing this scandal - which, too often, has allowed it to continue - we must address it with humble contribution, righteous anger and public outrage. Telling the truth cannot be wrong.”

“I pray our actions will:

- Help provide survivors with the strength to come forward, knowing they are not alone and their Church values and believes them – so we may apologize and offer assistance.
- Help protect children by rooting out and preventing this evil – making clear that the Church will not tolerate child sexual abuse, and shining a purifying and healing light where darkness has allowed abuse to continue.
- Help remove suspicion from the priests who serve and guide our parishes and our people. They are the heart and soul of our Church, and we have no reason to believe that any among them has committed the crime of child sexual abuse.”

In his letter, the Cardinal apologized for the harm done to children, as well as for the failure of the Church to serve survivors of abuse. He also committed to specific actions to better protect children – following through on the August 29 STAND Convocation – and to better help the healing of those harmed while in the care of the Church.

Finally, Cardinal Keeler called on the Catholic Community to come together in response to the sexual abuse of children, citing the leadership in renewing the Church provided by survivors of abuse, clergy, and all men and women who live the Church’s mission of service to others:

“We bishops have a responsibility to recommit ourselves to loving and serving the faithful. I humbly ask forgiveness for my mistakes. Please pray for me so that I may better serve.”

“Now, is a pivotal time for our Church. Now is the time to answer scandal with service, rededicating ourselves to embody Christ on earth. We must come together, rather than turn away, in response to this terrible problem, restoring trust at every level within our Catholic community. I pray that from this pain the Church will emerge, purified and more holy. Now, please God, we must lead and we must serve.”

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