



8.14.2018

**Statement from Bishop Lawrence Persico
upon release of the 40th Statewide Grand Jury Report**

Today, I want to express my sorrow directly to the victims of sexual abuse that occurred within the Diocese of Erie.

You have suffered in darkness for a very long time.

As the grand jury report demonstrates, you have experienced unimaginably cruel behavior by the very individuals who should have had the greatest interest in protecting you. You were betrayed by people holding themselves out as servants of God, teachers of children or leaders in the community.

Each of you has your own story, with pain and grief that is unique to you. I do not presume to know the depth of the anguish you have experienced or the mixed emotions you may be feeling now that some of your stories have been made public. I do know that the consequences of sexual abuse can profoundly affect many aspects of life, from mental health and relationships, to employment and even faith in God.

Many of you say you continue to feel guilty for what occurred. I want to assure you that you are not responsible, in any way, for what happened to you.

I admire those of you who were able to come forward and testify. It surely took courage. I also understand those who did not feel able or ready to come forward in this way. As I said, each of you is on your own journey.

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And so, I humbly offer my sincere apology to each victim who has been violated by anyone affiliated with the Catholic Church. I hope that you can accept it. I know that apologizing is only one step in a very long and complex process of healing.

You may be aware that we recently unveiled new policies and implemented procedures to ensure that this criminal behavior is stopped. We just released another update of our website today, adding names in light of the grand jury report. This is one sign of our commitment to transparency.

But this is not the moment to focus on our efforts. Today, I simply stand before you, humbled and sorrowful.

I know the abuse you endured continues to cause great pain in your lives and in the lives of those who love you. Because of the report, the public will begin to understand your pain in a new way. The men and women who served on the grand jury have spent two years listening to your stories. I am grateful for their service on this difficult assignment.

The grand jury has challenged us as a Catholic diocese to put victims first and to continue to improve ways to protect children and youth. We have heard that challenge, we acknowledge it, and we accept it.

Today, I pledge to victims:

- The Diocese of Erie will not shroud abusers in secrecy — no matter who they are or how long ago the abuse occurred. We acknowledge the abuses of the past and are committed to being transparent with our decisions going forward.
- Allegations of abuse will always be turned over to the proper authorities for investigation. We plan to continue providing law enforcement with details through our own independent investigations as well.
- We will continue to publicize and provide counseling and related resources that are available to help you heal.
- We understand it can take time to come forward and report abuse. The Diocese of Erie offers to pay for counseling of abuse victims, no matter how long ago the abuse occurred or whether victims still live within the Diocese of Erie or not.

- I am willing to meet with any victim who wishes to meet with me and offer any pastoral support that I can.

Finally, I know the whole community is being deeply affected by the release of this report, and that people will respond in many different ways. As the leader of the Catholic Church in northwest Pennsylvania, I invite the faithful to join me in turning to God in this moment of darkness. Prayer must be one aspect of our response to the grand jury report. Therefore, I have asked all of our pastors to open the doors of their churches from 7 am to 7 pm on Saturday, September 15—the feast of Our Mother of Sorrows.

I invite all people to make time on that day to visit a church. Out of respect for each individual, I simply ask that you spend some quiet time there in prayer. You may want to pray for victims. You may be a victim yourself and wish to use the time to pray for healing. You may want to pray that the leaders of the church renew their commitment to Christian discipleship, providing strong moral leadership. You may want to pray for the grace and faith you need in your own life at this time. However you are inspired by the Holy Spirit, I invite you to come and pray.

We have much work to do to rebuild trust, in a church where leaders have failed.

I commit myself and this diocese to assist in healing for victims and, in fact, for the wider community.

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