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Ash Wednesday 2014

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His Eminence Cardinal Sean O'Malley, O.F.M.Cap.  
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Your Eminence,

We are writing to express our concern regarding the interview with Pope Francis in *Corriere della Sera* and *La Nacion*, and to ask for your help in mitigating the interview's effects. In his remarks, as you know, Pope Francis unfortunately represents the Church as the victim in the sexual abuse crisis, enduring attacks despite its "transparency" and "accountability," which Francis characterizes as perhaps second to none. He personally praises Pope Benedict, while not even personally mentioning the victims of abuse, whose "cases" are terrible, Pope Francis says, and whose "statistics" are impressive.

The Holy Father's impersonal treatment of the church's own victims is sadly in keeping with his failure, during the first year of his pontificate, to act on the scourge of clergy abuse or meet with a single victim. The victims themselves cannot help but notice that Pope Francis has met with many people of all kinds, and has been praised for his humble and accessible ways. Is there something about the victims of sexual abuse by priests and religious that disqualifies them from the Holy Father's kindness and regard?

As you know, Pope Benedict served a hard apprenticeship at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2001–2005, when he spent his Fridays reading the abuse files. He called it his penance. His secretary, Bishop Charles Scicluna, spent long hours talking with the victims of Fr. Marcial Maciel, and Benedict acted at last on the valuable intelligence he received from the Maciel survivors. You too have spent many hours reviewing abuse files and talking with the victims. You know that the Church's first tentative steps toward transparency and accountability are really a gift from the survivors, and that the media have played an important and honorable role in that education.

We beg you to bring your experience and knowledge to the Holy Father, and convince him that, among the poor and the poor in spirit, it is especially the *survivors* who evangelize us. Encourage him to see that the Church is eternally in the survivors' debt, because it is through them that we have begun to face the terrible reality and legacy of sexual abuse by priests and religious.

Judging from the Pope's long silence and inaction regarding clergy abuse, and his words in *Corriere della Sera* yesterday, Pope Francis himself needs to be evangelized and radicalized by the survivors' experience, and that process must clearly begin with you. Two roads diverge from this moment for Francis. Will he continue to demonize the media, ignore the victims, and triumphalize the changes that have been forced on the Church by survivors, investigative reporters, and secular investigations? Or will he seize the opportunity to see the survivors as the Church's own poor and dispossessed – her particular responsibility?

Seizing the opportunity is not just about papal meetings with victims – a genre that you invented. We think you would agree that Pope Francis has the character and the skills to transform the scripted encounters of Benedict's pontificate into something deeper and more productive. But Pope Francis also has the leadership skills and organizational gifts to transform the Vatican abuse bureaucracy. Placing the Commission under the CDF, if the Congregation continues to be led by Cardinal Gerhard Müller, is a decision taken to limit change and creativity. Müller is simply not the right man for the job. We feel strongly that you and Francis need someone like Archbishop Diarmuid Martin in Rome, if the CDF and the Commission are to be converted into a transparent and accountable force for children's rights. And nothing less than such a transformation will extricate the Church from its dire circumstances – the endemic rape and torture of children by priests and religious, and the cover-up by your colleagues.

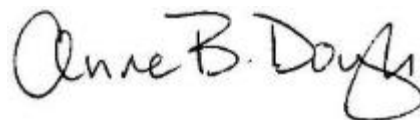
One year ago, you courageously stated that “there needs to be a path” for disciplining bishops, and you said that “it's something the next pope will have to deal with.” You told the Wall Street Journal that without a global policy, “improvising” will cause additional harm in this “minefield.” We wrote a letter to you and the other U.S. cardinals on that occasion, which we enclose. “Bishop accountability” can't wait any longer, and should not take a back seat to Vatican finances and planning for the synod. The other reforms mentioned in our 2013 letter are also urgent – all bishops and major superiors worldwide must publish lists of accused, as you have done in Boston. Zero tolerance must be made real in the universal norms that the Holy See is preparing. And the Church must embrace mandatory reporting, instead of hiding behind locally poor reporting laws.

We hope that you can also help Pope Francis revisit his flawed strategy with the UN. His outreach to the poor will seem hollow and inconsistent, if he is not first reaching out to the Church's own victims, to the men and women who are dispossessed and destitute because of the Church's own actions and neglect. The Church, as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, has a clear responsibility and a perfect opportunity. We hope that through your good offices, the Holy Father will embrace the opportunity and accept the responsibility.

With sincere good wishes,



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