

Local View: Sometimes, finding justice takes dogged determination

From the column: "(Duluth's St. Michael's) parish and I have been through a terrible, traumatizing experience."



The Rev. William C. Graham

Opinion by the Rev. William C. Graham

April 24, 2024 at 1:30 PM

I returned to my parish of St. Michael's in Duluth on Sunday, April 14, for the first time since May 2016. The parish and I have been through a terrible, traumatizing experience. I was falsely accused and denied both justice and mercy by our local church. The Vatican pronounced my innocence in documents I hope

become public; they do not reflect favorably on the Catholic Diocese of Duluth ("[Duluth priest removed from credibly accused list, duties restored](#)," March 29).

A number of folks have asked why I didn't just quit and go away. That is not how justice is accomplished; it is not how we seek the truth, who is Christ and who will set us free. Doing the right thing is a demanding task.

I found the path to justice exhausting and worrisome and very, very, very expensive. All that we have is our human dignity, and it is our obligation to assert and defend that dignity as we seek the face of God. Pope St. Leo the Great told us of that duty of ours when he said in the fifth century, "Christian: remember your dignity!"

I am deeply sorry that the pursuit of justice was so long and difficult for the people of St. Michael's, for me, and for all who were involved. Those who stood for justice will enjoy what the psalmist promised: The Lord does wonders for his faithful ones and hears us when we call upon him. The light of the Lord will shine on us, and he will put gladness into our hearts.

The Vatican official who made the last determination of my case spoke out on March 25. He is Archbishop Charles Scicluna, adjunct secretary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. [He told Vatican Media](#) that, "The pope very often repeats this phrase: 'When one of us suffers, we all suffer'." Scicluna added, "If there is this attitude of solidarity, if there is the thirst for justice of which Jesus speaks, but also the will to do good, then the law becomes a living instrument; otherwise, like all laws, it could remain a dead letter."

I am grateful for the church's laws and courts. I received no justice, no comfort, and no word of mercy from the Diocese of

Duluth during my long ordeal, and I told the bishop often, and the previous bishop (deceased), that Psalm 31 speaks to my pain: "I am like a dead man, forgotten, like a thing thrown away."

Pope Paul VI told us that if we want peace we must work for justice. We who seek Christ among us must understand that justice is the first virtue of both church and civilization. Without justice, we have no future or no hope.

I am grateful to the Vatican, my legal team, my family and friends, and many of the members past and present of St. Michael's parish who insisted justice be done.

We cannot walk away from injustice and hope the universe will fix it. Our mission is to build the reign of God among us. We cannot do so if we ignore the demands of justice. Justice is first and obligatory. We are bound to seek justice; we are called to do charity.

Christ "claims dominion over all creation that He may present to (the) almighty Father an eternal and universal kingdom: a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, (and) a kingdom of justice, love, and peace," as it reads in the Preface of Christ the King.

We Christians are called to be men and women of peace, in imitation of Jesus, with whom we are on the road and whose spirit gathers us to himself. At St. Michael's, our immediate task will be to pray together and to listen to each other, inclining the ear of our hearts. After that, we will ask each other: Where do we go from here? We can't have a plan or an agenda yet, but we will move to healing and peace, reconciliation, and cooperation with grace: "Proclaiming the Gospel in Word, Sacrament, and Service," as is stated in the 2015 parish mission statement.

The Rev. Fr. William C. Graham was pastor of St. Michael's

Parish in Duluth from 1982 to 1990 and from 2016 to the present. The homily on which this commentary is based is at [youtube.com/watch?v=GWePjH66bzU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWePjH66bzU) .