



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

Office of the Bishop

June 26, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,

Earlier this month, I attended the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) annual spring assembly in Baltimore. At the top of our agenda was discussion and voting on several measures relating to our ongoing response to the Church's clergy sexual abuse scandal. During the four days of the meeting, we dedicated our discussion and work almost entirely to the issue of our responsibility in handling allegations of clergy sexual abuse against minors.

With the release in May of his *Motu Proprio, Vos estis lux mundi*, Pope Francis provided a set of universal norms for empowering the global Church in responding to and reporting abuse. Part of our work in Baltimore was to adapt and enact these norms for the United States and to fortify the work of accountability and prevention already being done here and in dioceses across the country through the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and its essential norms, established in 2002.

We approved three important initiatives to be implemented in collaboration with lay leaders at local and national levels:

- Establishing a nationwide third-party system to allow confidential reporting of bishops regarding complaints of abuse or misconduct;
- Establishing protocols for imposing limitations on former bishops removed from office for grave reasons; and
- Establishing a protocol for implementing the pope's norms for how metropolitan archbishops are to investigate allegations against bishops. The metropolitan is the archbishop within a province of dioceses; in Michigan, this is the archbishop of Detroit.

In addition, we approved a statement conveying our remorse for past abuses and recommitting to our moral responsibilities as bishops.

The issue of clergy sexual abuse is a painful part of our story as a Church and one we must be open to ongoing conversations about while maintaining our commitment to healing the wounds that remain.

In our diocese, we are vigilant about providing support and care for survivors, safeguarding children, preventing occurrences of future abuse, and accountability in reporting allegations of abuse.

Here and in dioceses across the country, we have made great strides in these areas. Since 2002, in the Diocese of Grand Rapids, more than 24,000 adults and 106,000 children have been trained in abuse prevention and reporting through certified safe environment programs.

Every allegation of clergy sexual abuse is taken seriously — even those made against a deceased member of the clergy or reported long after the criminal statute of limitations has run out. Every allegation is turned over to the appropriate civil authorities.

Survivors who come forward are treated with dignity and respect and given the help and support they need to move toward healing, through both prayer and material means.

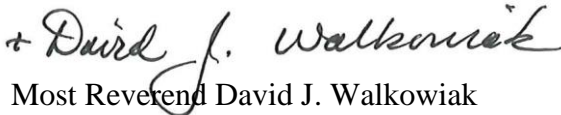
While led by the bishops, the Church's work of preventing and investigating abuse is largely accomplished by lay persons. Allegations of abuse which occur in our diocese are reviewed by our diocesan review board, comprised of seven members of the laity and two priests. I am thankful for their expertise and commitment.

I encourage you to learn more about safe environment and abuse prevention training and processes in our diocese at GRdiocese.org, click the 'Protecting God's Children' menu.

This fall, our parishes will be forming small groups to participate in the program, "Healing Our Church" through Renew International. These small groups will allow participants to work through thoughts and feelings about the clergy abuse scandal, explore why we remain Catholic, reaffirm the essentials of our faith, rebuild trust, and recommit to discipleship. I will be sharing more information as we enter the fall.

Please continue to pray with me that through the grace of Jesus, the Divine Healer, and the intervention of our Blessed Mother Mary, we may continue to strive together toward greater healing and holiness for our Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ David J. Walkowiak". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of Grand Rapids

If you have knowledge of sexual abuse by clergy or another representative of the Church, please contact the Michigan Attorney General's office at 844-324-3374.