



August 23, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, recently reminded us of the words of the Apostle Paul: “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor 12:26). With you, I share the suffering of victims of sexual abuse on the part of clergy, and the suffering of all who have lost trust and confidence in leaders of our Church.

Upon hearing credible and substantiated allegations of sexual abuse on the part of Archbishop Theodore McCarrick and the horrific accounts of the Pennsylvania grand jury report, including the failure of Church leaders to protect children, teenagers and young adults from abuse, I, like you, felt tremendous anger and shame that such crimes occurred within our Church.

I have had several opportunities to speak about these issues in recent days through statements, homilies, a letter to priests, and podcasts. (These are all available on the diocesan website.) In each instance, I knew full well that words cannot sufficiently express my regret for the sins of Church leaders and priests who betrayed Christ and his people. No matter how insufficient words may be, however, I again convey my sincere apologies to victims of abuse and reassure them, as well as the rest of the Catholic faithful in this Diocese, of my desire to support you in every way possible. Additionally, I assure you that no priest credibly accused of child sexual abuse is, or ever will be, in active ministry in this Diocese.

I was ordained a bishop in 2002, the same year the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People was enacted to establish standards for reporting and investigating accusations, as well as to help victims heal from the trauma they experienced. As such, I have always implemented these procedures throughout my ministry as a bishop. Once again, I wish to assure you that in our Diocese, immediately upon receiving an accusation of abuse, we report it to law enforcement. In addition, all evidence about each allegation is assessed by our diocesan review board, composed of a majority of lay men and women who have expertise in areas that will assist with the process.

Policies are essential, and they must continue to be implemented and followed. This crisis, however, is not only about policies — it is about evil, the moral failings of priests, and at times a lack of courage and integrity on the part of bishops and other Church leaders. Priests and bishops should not need policies to keep from committing immoral acts or to report heinous crimes to the authorities. We should need only a well-formed conscience, a commitment to Jesus Christ, and fidelity to the promises of our vocation. With the Lord’s grace, we must strive to root out evil and work tirelessly to protect all young people as a matter of respect for their precious dignity as beloved children of God.

When witnessing such failures, many will naturally question their confidence and trust in the Church. Please always remember that Christ is Head of the Church and that he never fails us. While the Lord in his divinity works through his bishops and priests, at times they in their humanity fail to protect the flock, even in the most disturbing ways. Please join me in praying for our priests, as in this troubling time they greatly appreciate the support you have shown.

I pray that, together, we will renew our faith in Christ, who promises to be with us through periods of darkness and uncertainty. We call upon his Divine Mercy and saving help as we seek healing, purification and transformation. May Our Lord guide and protect his Church and his people, now and always.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael F. Burbidge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning of the first name.

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge
Bishop of Arlington