



Diocese of Palm Beach

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Office of
THE BISHOP

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in the Lord,

Most recently we have again been shocked, distressed and disheartened about the matter of clerical sexual abuse of minors. The situation which led to the resignation of former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the growing revelations of sexual abuse in other parts of the world and the distressing release of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury clerical sexual abuse report have almost simultaneously made evident the very sinful side of the Church through those who have failed a life of service to the Gospel by an abuse of office, authority and trust. The matter has raised many questions which need to be answered. It has also caused intense pain and justified anger like that of the Lord who overturned the tables of the money changers in the temple and cast them out. However, anger which fuels itself on anything less than a true passion for conversion only further destroys.

Many of us in the Diocese of Palm Beach feel the pain, mistrust and anger at this time especially in view of our own difficult history. However, I wish to assure the faithful of our Diocese that we ardently continue our commitment to the protection of our young and vulnerable members as a priority of priorities. We have been in full compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* since its promulgation by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2002. Every effort, vigilance and expense will continue to be utilized in every parish, school and level of our diocesan life in this regard. We continue to urge anyone who has experienced abuse by clergy or any church personnel to report this to us and to the police no matter how long ago it may have occurred. We are concerned about protecting the vulnerable and not ourselves. Even the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report indicated that, despite the manner in which cases of clerical sexual abuse were handled previously, since the implementation of the *Charter*, almost no cases have been found. That does not excuse past sins but it certainly gives us hope for the future and a perspective in dealing with anger and pain which aims at conversion.

As we face this troubling reality, we do so at that time of the year when we have just celebrated the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is a good one for us to turn to as she is a source of comfort as well as the model of what the Church is meant to be. Mary is the person who, through the special grace of God, lived a life without sin and she graces the sinful Church with a sinless existence that gives us hope for continued purification, growth and striving for perfection. Mary also reveals that it is holiness, not corporate success, which is the priority for the Church. Saint John Paul II was fond of referring to the teaching expressed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church that the Marian role precedes the Petrine role. Mary comes before Peter and the apostles. It was Mary who shared with the wayward and distracted apostles what she treasured in her heart. As the hierarchy struggles to continue to right the wrongs of the past and to continue to protect young people in the future, we especially need to look to Mary with prayer as the center of our ministries.

As a bishop of the Church, I offer my profound apologies to those so deeply affected by clerical sexual abuse. I assure all of my continued efforts to protect young and vulnerable persons in accord with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. I also wish to thank our dedicated and competent staff, as well as our priests, deacons and faithful for their commitment and assistance in protecting our young people. I realize that words are not enough and I commit my continued efforts in working with the Conference of Bishops for ongoing reform.

Let us pray for healing, for continued conversion and for an open heart to the Lord like that of Mary, Queen of the Apostles, the patroness of our Diocese.

With every prayerful wish, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Gerald M. Barbarito
Bishop of Palm Beach