

A Call to Action from the Body of Christ

We the people of Good Shepherd Parish call upon the Bishop of Nashville, the Most Reverend J. Mark Spalding, to take the national lead in eliminating sexual abuse by clergy in the Catholic Church. We call for a dynamic, new program of accountability, contrition and transparency to be established / aggressively implemented / widely advertised in the Diocese of Nashville as an example for the rest of the Catholic Church to follow. The program should be composed of best practices from other dioceses and organizations to include the following examples.

Accountability Significantly strengthen diocesan Safe Environment by: 1) Upgrading the “whistle blowers” communication program to one *under lay leadership* that has the confidentiality, competence, compassion and independent authority to receive, investigate, substantiate/obviate, and **publicly and immediately** recommend prosecution/dismissal of reported sexual abuse cases from an office that reports directly to the Bishop (similar to the dual reporting chain of a military inspector general); 2) Adopting, advertising and fully implementing a *very public* policy to prosecute any employee of the diocese to the maximum extent of criminal / canon law, any confirmed sexual abuser or anyone who has abetted a sexual abuser or concealed sexual abuse; and, 3) Adopting, advertising and implementing a *very public* policy to prosecute diocesan employees who are sexual abusers or those who abetted or concealed such crimes where the statute of limitations has expired, under Title 18 of the U. S. Code for conspiracy to conceal a felony, where the statute of limitations ends upon court verdict.

Contrition Demonstrate humility, responsibility and resolve to eliminate sexual abuse within the Catholic Church hierarchy by: 1) Promulgating a *very visible and public* policy of no tolerance for sexual abuse by any employee of the diocese whether lay or ordained as a recognizable part of all media — prominently displayed on the diocese home web page, on the front page of the Tennessee Register, and on all other public correspondence; 2) Making every current and future employee of the diocese sign an oath to submit to a new Diocesan Code of Conduct and a new Norms of the Diocese of Nashville which would add the above accountability provisions as well as additional provisions for employees to avoid even the appearance of impropriety and to continually honor and dignify the Body of Christ; and, 3) Unceasing prayer for the victims, faithful and clergy.

Transparency Let the victims, the faithful and the world know that the Body of Christ, the institution of the Catholic Church and its members are serious about needed reform and transparency by: 1) Promoting a Church wide initiative to report canonical trial sexual abuse investigations and results **publicly and immediately** upon determination; 2) Moving and displaying the abuse reporting link to the diocesan home page (similar to St. Paul – Minneapolis diocese) rather than burying that link under the “Safe Environment” program; and 3) Making the aforementioned initiatives publicly implemented and tracked through monthly articles in the Tennessee Register.

In summary, the Catholic Church must initiate such public, transparent and reinvigorated action to eliminate the desecrations of the Body of Christ which have been again revealed by the recent Pennsylvania grand jury findings and to show victims that the Church is serious about justice — which is often a precursor to mercy and forgiveness. Without public, transparent and stern action, the Catholic Church in the United States can expect to be in a position of vulnerability with regard to having a voice on faith and morals, thus advancing the potential of a Godless America. Finally, a public, transparent and stern response to such despicable and disgusting behavior as the sexual abuse of the most vulnerable, is a message to those who are thinking of leaving the Church — giving them hope that they can hold on to St. Peter’s words “Lord, to whom should we go? You have the words of eternal life”.

Bishop Spalding, it is imperative that you seek out and implement best practices from other dioceses and organizations that make the Nashville diocese a robust model for eradicating clergy *and* church leader sexual abuse. Please take the lead in this much needed demonstration of moral and practical resolve.

Sincerely, the following members of Good Shepherd Parish, Decherd, Tennessee.