

Office of the Bishop
Diocese of Camden

August 17, 2018

My Sisters and Brothers:

Recent reports about the terrible abuse of children at the hands of priests in Pennsylvania prompt me to write to you with frankness. I do so out of a shepherd's love and with fatherly respect.

I join you in praying for those who have been betrayed in the past by some in the Church, and for their families, and others who have been scarred by this atrocious misconduct.

Reading about the Pennsylvania grand jury report is painful. Of all the places that we expect that our children would be safe, it is within our churches, schools and institutions. The fact that the Church, in the past, failed in this most fundamental obligation is heartbreaking. I am ashamed and disgusted by the past actions of some bishops and priests.

Even more difficult to read, the Pennsylvania grand jury report mentions two priests from our Diocese, John Connor and James Hopkins, both of whom were removed from priestly ministry years ago:

- John Connor was removed from ministry 16 years ago and is restricted to a special facility in Missouri, and
- James Hopkins was removed from ministry 23 years ago, convicted of child abuse, served time in prison and is now on the sexual offender registry known as "Megan's List."

While the report is an important reminder of shameful past failings in the Church – including in our own Diocese – I want to let you know that we are doing everything possible to protect our children and shield them from harm.

Since 2003 we have provided safe environment training to all of the children in our schools and religious education programs. This training enables them to recognize what constitutes physical and sexual abuse, and empowers them to report that to a caring adult. We also provide training to adults who are in regular contact with children to recognize warning signs of abuse, and to provide them with the knowledge of when and how to report to the appropriate authorities. The Diocese also requires all adults who have regular contact with children to have passed criminal history background checks.

In accordance with an agreement with the New Jersey Attorney General, since 2002 the Diocese of Camden has reported all allegations of abuse to law enforcement authorities,

- whether the person bringing the complaint is now an adult,
- no matter how long ago the abuse is alleged to have occurred,
- and whether or not the perpetrator is living or deceased.

Both the teachings of the Church and the civil law require that the best interests of the child always be paramount. It is shameful that, in past decades, far too many in the Church failed in their responsibility to keep predators from children. The Diocese is taking every possible step to see that this does not happen in the future.

Anyone who was abused should report it to law enforcement authorities. If an individual is hesitant for any reason, we maintain a toll-free number to facilitate reporting. This number can be found on the diocesan website, and is also available to victims who wish to arrange for professional counseling to help them heal.

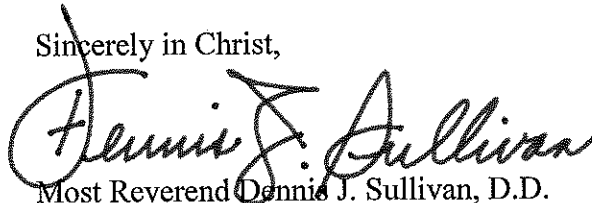
Furthermore, recent reports about the abuse of power by Archbishop McCarrick are repulsive. Those in positions of leadership in the Church who misuse their authority over others betray the Lord's calling that I, and my brother bishops and priests, have accepted and answered. I have met with all of our diocesan seminarians and provided them with a reporting mechanism in the event that anyone in a position of authority seeks to morally compromise them. I will be providing a similar protocol to the diocesan priests at their forthcoming Fall convocation.

The priests of South Jersey who serve you now in our parishes strive to be faithful and dedicated men. Like you yourselves, they are disappointed and disgusted when they read and hear of these treasonous sins against the Church's teachings. They suffer with you, and need your prayers and support.

Finally, let me say that I am honored and humbled to be your bishop, and that I have come to treasure the people of the Diocese of Camden. It is this which prompts me – while ashamed and embarrassed at the failings of some in the Church – to assure you that we do all in our power to ensure the safety of those entrusted to our care. These accounts of past abuse have shaken my heart and soul, and I imagine that they have likewise affected you. I pray that neither your faith in, nor your love for, Christ and His Church would be lessened by these horrific reports.

I ask you to pray for me, and for all of the priests and seminarians of the Diocese of Camden, that we may remain faithful stewards and servants of the most precious of God's gifts – you, His people.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis J. Sullivan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "D".

Most Reverend Dennis J. Sullivan, D.D.
Bishop of Camden