



Paulist Center Boston

Attentive to the Holy Spirit and nourished by vibrant liturgy, we are a Catholic community that welcomes all, fosters healing and reconciliation, and acts for justice.

DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION FOR WEEKENDS OF AUGUST 25-26 AND SEPTEMBER 1-2, 2018

Dear Companions on the Journey,

This last weekend was not “business as usual” in the Paulist Center Community. In the wake of the horrors revealed in the Pennsylvania Attorney General’s report, we needed to observe a different moment. I announced to all attending the weekend masses that we would be nourished by Word (including homily on the Scriptures) and Sacrament and we would offer prayers for the victims, perpetrators and enablers. Then, after the final hymn, for those who wished to remain, we would have a listening session for all. For one of the common threads running through so many commentaries on the internet was that *lay people did not have a voice*, a forum, in which to express their views. I chose to provide a forum here at the Paulist Center. We honored each contribution by careful listening.

Here are some of my comments introducing the listening sessions:

There is no defense for the indefensible, no excuse for the inexcusable.

The report noted that in all but two PA dioceses, the AG’s reported that 8% of the 5000 priests who served in 70-year period had been involved in abuse (a few more than 300 priests of which “only” two in last ten years). The 2011 John Jay School of Criminology Study revealed that the overwhelming number of cases occurred in the 60s, 70s, peaking in the mid-80s, with a trickle since 2002. The PA report reflected this same trend.

Even though the vast majority of allegations and crimes occurred before the Dallas Charter (2002), the question still screams out, *Why didn’t the bishops do better?* Following Jesuit Tom Reese’s analysis, I noted:

1. There was a pervasive Clerical Culture of protection. Like police officers, football teams and other closely-knit fraternities, priests covered for one another, even if the majority of priests were unaware of what was happening.
2. Bishops listened to insurance agents and lawyers: Don’t meet with victims or their families. (Here, I observed, they really gave up our script – the Gospel – and handed their communication to the lawyers.)
3. As late as 1992, psychologists were advising that some pedophiles and ephebophiles could return to ministry. (In the next decade, the psychological community learned better. Pedophilia is incurable. So in 2002, Church leadership adopted a “zero tolerance” policy, the “Dallas Charter.” That is, with one act of abuse, the perpetrator was permanently out of ministry. No second chance.)
4. The bishops kept the abuse secret because they did not want to scandalize the laity and they wanted to protect Church assets from lawsuits.
5. Up until 2002, untrained priests handled most of the cases. (With the Dallas Charter, after 2002, the mostly-Lay Review Boards, including specialists and experts, reviewed all allegations reported to the church.)

(over)

While much more needs to be thought through, these are assurances I gave as part of our Paulist Center response

1. Make/keep the Paulist Center safe for children: here we need the cooperation of all members;
2. Make/keep the Paulist Center safe, indeed welcoming, to criticism and constructive recommendations;
3. Make/keep the Paulist Center a place of healing (especially for victims) as well as outreach: Our homilies, following the Scriptures, need, alternately, to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

The staff and Pastoral Council will, respectively be reviewing our response.

But my biggest heartache and fear is that some of our Paulist Center Community will simply drift away. They will say, "I've had it with the Catholic Church. No more." And they will drift away.

My plea: **Begin with Jesus Christ in your life.** Gather where other followers of Jesus gather: This might not be, any longer, the Roman Catholic Church, which you experience as corrupt to the core. Perhaps you may find Churches with more integrity. But in your prayer, start there – with Jesus Christ—and not so much with the "institutional church," which, sadly, is replete with sinners.

Quoting diocesan priest Bryan Parrish: *We grieve together, we are angry together, and, I pray, we will persevere together.*

What do you think?

And let us pray for/with one another.

Michael

Michael McGarry, CSP
Director
The Paulist Center