

Jerry's Journal



On Wednesday, September 26, the priests of the Archdiocese met with Archbishop Allen Vigneron at Sacred Heart Seminary to discuss the events related to the sexual misconduct of the clergy and the moral failure on the part of church leadership to punish the guilty and ensure the safety of those who are most vulnerable, particularly children.

The session opened with the Archbishop pledging that protecting children and the vulnerable with every bit of strength God provides us must be of primary importance. Grave and serious damage has been inflicted on the innocent by the crimes, sins, and cover-ups which have taken place. There is no quick fix to the hurt and harm which has been done. Reestablishing bonds of trust may take years, even decades.

I wish it was possible to report that the result of that Wednesday session led to a clear plan of action going forward, but to state that would not be entirely accurate.

The meeting at Sacred Heart Seminary took the form of a town hall session whereby roughly 150 priests were seated in groups with 6 to 8 clergy at each table. We were then given a series of reflection questions to ponder. After a period of lengthy discussion, a representative from each table was designated as spokesman to summarize the deliberations of each group.

At the table I was seated at the consensus of all was that, due to the failures of the past, the Church needs to turn over to an impartial third party the responsibility of serving as the intake agency and the reporting voice of claims of abuse to the proper authorities. To be blunt, the Catholic Church does not at this time, and for the foreseeable future, will not have the credibility to serve in this role.

A second recommendation, voiced by many of the priests present, was that there is a need for more involvement by the laity to serve on church review boards. The involvement of the laity would seek to guarantee that no claim of abuse would be swept under the carpet going forward.

A third recommendation relates to the Dallas Charter of 2002. Some background information is first necessary to explain this recommendation.

In June of 2002, in the wake of the sexual abuse crisis reported by newspapers throughout the country, U.S. bishops gathered in Dallas to hammer out protocols for dealing with cases of clergy sexual misconduct. The original draft of what came to be known as "The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People"- commonly known now as "The Dallas Charter" - established new safeguards for accountability and transparency related to the protection of minors. In the original draft, the charter established provisions which bound "all clerics" - not just priests and deacons, but also bishops, related to sexual misconduct.

In the second draft of the document there was a revision made to change the word clerics to priests and deacons. When Elden Francis Curtis, the then-Archbishop of Omaha asked why the wording of the document was changed from clerics to priests and

deacons, he was told it was because the disciplining of bishops was reserved to the Vatican and was, therefore, beyond the scope of the charter.

Without question, bishops are bound by the same moral, civil and criminal laws as priests and deacons. They should be held accountable to their people. Authority without accountability is tyranny. Our discussion of September 26 recommended bishops be held to the same standards as priests and deacons. However, according to the Code of Canon Law, no group of laity or priests has the authorization to make this change. The U.S. bishops should therefore make this revision and forward it to the Vatican for approval. Allegedly, there are reports that such a revision is under consideration by the U.S. bishops but there is no timeline as to if and when it might be approved.

As we left the seminary on that Wednesday last month I could only hope that from the church crisis of today, the church of tomorrow will emerge. When it emerges, it will be a church that has lost much in terms of people and its relevance (as seen by a vast number of people.) I'm not sure if I will live to see that emergence in my lifetime. The crisis we are in is that profound and deep. Ultimately it will be you, the laity, which will resurrect the Church from its ashes. The roots of change will be grounded in the faith of those who strive to hold the Church accountable. The Catholic Church is your church. It was built on the faith of people who sacrificed greatly through persecution and adversity. We are in a critical moment of Church history. Remain strong. Demand accountability and transparency on the part of leadership and we will emerge from this crisis a stronger and more credible witness to the Gospel.

Fr Jerry Slowinski



“Marc” My Words

On Saturday, October 6 Archbishop Allen Vigneron ordained seven men to the order of the permanent diaconate. These seven men, upon receiving the sacrament of holy orders, will be assigned to various parishes within the Archdiocese of Detroit. Among these seven men are Deacon Jeff Loeb, a parishioner here at St. Paul of Tarsus, now assigned to a neighboring parish as their deacon, and Deacon Greg Willoughby, my intern, who was also assigned to a neighboring parish.



May God bless them in their ministry and may we offer prayers for them as well. Deacon Jeff's Mass of Thanksgiving was at the 11:30. Deacon Greg's Mass of Thanksgiving is next Sunday, October 14 at the 11:30.

Did you know that the sacrament of holy orders and the sacrament of marriage are known as the “sacraments of service?” Deacons, priests, and bishops (these are the men who receive the sacrament of holy orders) are ordained to serve the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. Husband and wife, through the sacrament of marriage, make vows to serve one another and their families as part of the domestic church.

In the long form of today's Gospel, Jesus talks about the sacrament of marriage and of divorce. Jesus is saying that the sacrament of marriage is indissoluble, only ended by the death of one of the spouses. A civil divorce ends the civil contract between the couple, however, the sacramental bond of marriage is presumed to be permanent and continues beyond divorce. Divorce is man-made while a sacramental marriage is God-made. The former is a contract while the latter is a covenant. An annulment is NOT a Catholic divorce. It is an investigation into and a declaration that God did not join the couple in a sacramental bond. Both sacraments of service leave a character of permanence on the soul of the recipient. The only difference is that the sacrament of marriage can be repeated but only if one of the spouses has entered eternal life.

The last part or the short form of today's Gospel is a part of a reading that is proclaimed at baptisms. Jesus rebukes his disciples because they are denying access of children to Jesus. Jesus tells his disciples that "the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." For most of us we came into the Church, that is, became an adopted son or daughter of God, as a child at our baptism. It was a time of growth, innocence, and wonder for us. We were fully dependent upon our parents for everything. We loved our parents with an unconditional love. That is the type of love and action that allows us to remain a part of God's family. The same type of unconditional love that God sends our way every day. It is our call as Catholic Christians to show and share that type of love to others by the way we live our lives. It doesn't matter whether we are ordained ministers of the Church, the clergy composed of deacons, priests, and bishops, or married or single. We must show, share, and reflect a self-sacrificing love and when we do we receive in return God's...

Peace, Love, and Blessings,

Deacon Marc