

Cardinal Vincent Nichols has written to clergy of Westminster diocese in response to the letter from Pope Francis on the abuse of children in the Church.

The full text of the Cardinal's letter follows:

Dear Father,

As a priest and bishop, I have found the last few weeks both shocking and distressing. I am sure that you will have, too.

The plain and detailed disclosure of the extent of the abuse of children which has taken place in various parts of our Church, over so many years, has been so painful to follow and to take to heart. Yet to do so is absolutely necessary.

The initial response of Pope Francis was that of 'sorrow and shame'. I fully share that response.

I am so sorry for the hurt that has been caused, primarily to those whose lives have been radically damaged by childhood abuse, to their families, and to those who know personally a deep sense of trust that has been betrayed.

I am utterly ashamed that this evil has, for so long, found a place in our house, our Church. This evil has particular abhorrence because not only is it a terrible abuse of power, but also because, in its evil, it both employs and destroys the very goodness of faith and trust in God. As a Father in this House, I bear this shame in a direct way, for it is the direct responsibility of a father to protect his household from harm, no matter how difficult and complex that might be.

On Monday, Pope Francis, our Holy Father, addressed a letter to all members of the Church. I am sure you will have read it. Please urge your people to read it, too. It is available in many places and, in its entirety, on the website of the Diocese of Westminster. The Pope's letter begins with a quotation from St Paul: 'If one member suffers, all suffer together with it' (1 Cor 12.26). In doing so, he reflects on the ways in which we have paid insufficient attention to the suffering of those who have been abused, and on the ways in which we have to tackle this together, starting with the renewal of holiness which comes only with prayer and penitence.

Let us read this letter over and over again. It has so much to give us.

I share these thoughts with you as they have been constantly on my mind in these last weeks and days. Please be sure of my prayers for you. Please do share this letter, or these thoughts, with your people in the way you think best.

Let us turn to the Lord in our sorrow and shame, remembering the words of the Prophet Isaiah from Tuesday's Office of Readings: 'If you do not stand by me, you will not stand at all' (Is 7.9).

And let us pray for the renewal of family life through the World Meeting of Families, this weekend, so that all family life may find strength and joy in standing with the Lord!

With my renewed prayers and best wishes,

Yours devotedly,

Cardinal Vincent Nichols

Archbishop of Westminster

MESSAGE FROM BISHOP PHILIP

to the Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese

in light of the Report from the Pennsylvania Grand Jury

My dear People, I am sure that, like me, you were horrified, ashamed and angry when you read the report from the Pennsylvania Grand Jury about the sexual abuse of children by members of the clergy there these last 70 years. It is, in the words of Cardinal DiNardo, a 'moral catastrophe.' So many clergy seem to have been involved, so many victims. Whilst these are historic allegations and today's situation is different, even so this scandal soils the entire Church. It tests our faith. It can make us distrust the Church, especially its bishops and priests. We know as human beings we are all sinners and that the Church, which is the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, is made up of sinful people like you and me. Yet we ask: How could this have happened? How could this have been allowed to happen? More, what should we do? What can we do?

The first thing we need to do, every Catholic, is to pray for the victims. We need to offer the Rosary for the healing of the victims and their memories. We need to pray too for the forgiveness of those who harmed them and for the Church leaders who mishandled cases or sought to cover up. Full of sorrow, we need to make reparation for all the damage done. Constructively, we also need to pray for vocations to all states of life and ministry in the Church today, but especially for good priests, for inspiring priests who will be happy, healthy and holy, who will witness to the Divine nature of their calling and create an environment that is safe and wholesome, a welcoming Church for all. The causes of this crisis and the roots of child sexual abuse are complex. Here in England, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse will soon report its findings. Part of the tragedy of all this is that so many faithful priests and people, pursuing holiness and serving with integrity, can feel tainted by these revelations. This is why I wish hereby to acknowledge, encourage and support the thousands of people in our Diocese of Portsmouth who genuinely strive to do good, to speak the truth and to espouse holiness. Our clergy, religious and faithful, our parishes and schools, are surely a great force for good. Yet we must always be humble, reliant not on self but on God. So let's seek Him. Let us seek renewal. Let us seek holiness of life. Let us also ask the prayers of Mary, Mother of the Church. She must be full of sorrow at the damage these revelations do to the Body of Christ Her Son and to the evangelizing mission He gave us. May she pray earnestly for us now.

With my prayers and best wishes

In Corde Iesu,

+Philip Bishop of Portsmouth

Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis To the People of God

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor 12:26). These words of Saint Paul forcefully echo in my heart as I acknowledge once more the suffering endured by many minors due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons.

Crimes that inflict deep wounds of pain and powerlessness, primarily among the victims, but also in their family members and in the larger community of believers and nonbelievers alike.

Looking back to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient. Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated.

The pain of the victims and their families is also our pain, and so it is urgent that we once more reaffirm our commitment to ensure the protection of minors and of vulnerable adults.

1. If one member suffers...

In recent days, a report was made public which detailed the experiences of at least a thousand survivors, victims of sexual abuse, the abuse of power and of conscience at the hands of priests over a period of approximately seventy years.

Even though it can be said that most of these cases belong to the past, nonetheless as time goes on we have come to know the pain of many of the victims.

We have realized that these wounds never disappear and that they require us forcefully to condemn these atrocities and join forces in uprooting this culture of death; these wounds never go away.

The heart-wrenching pain of these victims, which cries out to heaven, was long ignored, kept quiet or silenced. But their outcry was more powerful than all the measures meant to silence it, or sought even to resolve it by decisions that increased its gravity by falling into complicity.

The Lord heard that cry and once again showed us on which side he stands. Mary’s song is not mistaken and continues quietly to echo throughout history.

For the Lord remembers the promise he made to our fathers: “he has scattered the proud in their conceit; he has cast down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty” (Lk 1:51-53).

We feel shame when we realize that our style of life has denied, and continues to deny, the words we recite.

With shame and repentance, we acknowledge as an ecclesial community that we were not where we should have been, that we did not act in a timely manner, realizing the magnitude and the gravity of the damage done to so many lives.

We showed no care for the little ones; we abandoned them.

I make my own the words of the then Cardinal Ratzinger when, during the Way of the Cross composed for Good Friday 2005, he identified with the cry of pain of so many victims and exclaimed: “How much filth there is in the Church, and even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to [Christ]! How much pride, how much self-complacency! Christ’s betrayal by his disciples, their unworthy reception of his body and blood, is certainly the greatest suffering endured by the Redeemer; it pierces his heart. We can only call to him from the depths of our hearts: *Kyrie eleison* – Lord, save us! (cf. *Mt 8:25*)” (Ninth Station).

2. ... all suffer together with it

The extent and the gravity of all that has happened requires coming to grips with this reality in a comprehensive and communal way. While it is important and necessary on every journey of conversion to acknowledge the truth of what has happened, in itself this is not enough.

Today we are challenged as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit. If, in the past, the response was one of omission, today we want solidarity, in the deepest and most challenging sense, to become our way of forging present and future history.

And this in an environment where conflicts, tensions and above all the victims of every type of abuse can encounter an outstretched hand to protect them and rescue them from their pain (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 228).

Such solidarity demands that we in turn condemn whatever endangers the integrity of any person. A solidarity that summons us to fight all forms of corruption, especially spiritual corruption.

The latter is “a comfortable and self-satisfied form of blindness. Everything then appears acceptable: deception, slander, egotism and other subtle forms of self-centeredness, for ‘even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light’ (2 Cor 11:14)” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 165).

Saint Paul’s exhortation to suffer with those who suffer is the best antidote against all our attempts to repeat the words of Cain: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (*Gen 4:9*).

I am conscious of the effort and work being carried out in various parts of the world to come up with the necessary means to ensure the safety and protection of the integrity of children and of vulnerable adults, as well as implementing zero tolerance and ways of making all those who perpetrate or cover up these crimes accountable.

We have delayed in applying these actions and sanctions that are so necessary, yet I am confident that they will help to guarantee a greater culture of care in the present and future.

Together with those efforts, every one of the baptized should feel involved in the ecclesial and social change that we so greatly need. This change calls for a personal and communal conversion that makes us see things as the Lord does.

For as Saint John Paul II liked to say: “If we have truly started out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he wished to be identified” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 49).

To see things as the Lord does, to be where the Lord wants us to be, to experience a conversion of heart in his presence. To do so, prayer and penance will help.

I invite the entire holy faithful People of God to a *penitential exercise of prayer and fasting*, following the Lord’s command.[1] This can awaken our conscience and arouse our solidarity and commitment to a culture of care that says “never again” to every form of abuse.

It is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God’s People.

Indeed, whenever we have tried to replace, or silence, or ignore, or reduce the People of God to small elites, we end up creating communities, projects, theological approaches, spiritualities and structures without roots, without memory, without faces, without bodies and ultimately, without lives.[2]

This is clearly seen in a peculiar way of understanding the Church’s authority, one common in many communities where sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience have occurred.

Such is the case with clericalism, an approach that “not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people”.^[3]

Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say “no” to abuse is to say an emphatic “no” to all forms of clericalism.

It is always helpful to remember that “in salvation history, the Lord saved one people. We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people. That is why no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual.

Rather, God draws us to himself, taking into account the complex fabric of interpersonal relationships present in the human community. God wanted to enter into the life and history of a people” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 6).

Consequently, the only way that we have to respond to this evil that has darkened so many lives is to experience it as a task regarding all of us as the People of God.

This awareness of being part of a people and a shared history will enable us to acknowledge our past sins and mistakes with a penitential openness that can allow us to be renewed from within.

Without the active participation of all the Church’s members, everything being done to uproot the culture of abuse in our communities will not be successful in generating the necessary dynamics for sound and realistic change.

The penitential dimension of fasting and prayer will help us as God’s People to come before the Lord and our wounded brothers and sisters as sinners imploring forgiveness and the grace of shame and conversion.

In this way, we will come up with actions that can generate resources attuned to the Gospel. For “whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 11).

It is essential that we, as a Church, be able to acknowledge and condemn, with sorrow and shame, the atrocities perpetrated by consecrated persons, clerics, and all those entrusted with the mission of watching over and caring for those most vulnerable.

Let us beg forgiveness for our own sins and the sins of others.

An awareness of sin helps us to acknowledge the errors, the crimes and the wounds caused in the past and allows us, in the present, to be more open and committed along a journey of renewed conversion.

Likewise, penance and prayer will help us to open our eyes and our hearts to other people's sufferings and to overcome the thirst for power and possessions that are so often the root of those evils.

May fasting and prayer open our ears to the hushed pain felt by children, young people and the disabled.

A fasting that can make us hunger and thirst for justice and impel us to walk in the truth, supporting all the judicial measures that may be necessary.

A fasting that shakes us up and leads us to be committed in truth and charity with all men and women of good will, and with society in general, to combatting all forms of the abuse of power, sexual abuse and the abuse of conscience.

In this way, we can show clearly our calling to be "a sign and instrument of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race" (*Lumen Gentium*, 1).

"If one member suffers, all suffer together with it", said Saint Paul. By an attitude of prayer and penance, we will become attuned as individuals and as a community to this exhortation, so that we may grow in the gift of compassion, in justice, prevention and reparation.

Mary chose to stand at the foot of her Son's cross. She did so unhesitatingly, standing firmly by Jesus' side.

In this way, she reveals the way she lived her entire life.

When we experience the desolation caused by these ecclesial wounds, we will do well, with Mary, "to insist more upon prayer", seeking to grow all the more in love and fidelity to the Church (SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, *Spiritual Exercises*, 319).

She, the first of the disciples, teaches all of us as disciples how we are to halt before the sufferings of the innocent, without excuses or cowardice. To look to Mary is to discover the model of a true follower of Christ.

May the Holy Spirit grant us the grace of conversion and the interior anointing needed to express before these crimes of abuse our compunction and our resolve courageously to combat them.

FRANCIS

Vatican City, 20 August 2018