

Archbishop McCarrick; the Pennsylvania report (Aug. 5, 2018)

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I address you now 1) so that you know I am paying attention to what is going on, and 2) because it's part of my ministry to be an advocate for the safety of people, their good reputations and the good name of our Church.

You have read about Archbishop McCarrick's demotion in this paper and in other media. By later this week, we expect to see the Pennsylvania grand jury publish its investigation of five dioceses in that state. At this writing, I do not know whether this probe was limited to crimes against minors, or which years it surveys, but it does name abusers and anyone who failed to make proper reports or firings.

Before continuing here, the suffering of victims of sexual abuse must be acknowledged. The victims themselves need acknowledgment. General prayers and apologies are necessary, but not sufficient. In each case, you or I may not know what to say when we speak with victims because of the uniqueness of each person and his or her history. I treat people as I would meeting anyone for the first time. I want to be present in the moment.

I know something about wanting to feel real in the moment. You might be surprised how often people walk past me because they don't know how to address me. ("Hello, bishop" is a start.)

So, with regard to victim-survivors, without minimizing what has happened in general, or what has happened to the particular victim, it is important to give a person the present moment when someone has already stolen parts of their past and future.

That being said, the McCarrick situation has renewed public inquiry about all of us bishops. It does not surprise me. Who knew what and when, and did not report it? The report on Archbishop McCarrick did surprise me. I had not heard even a whisper about him. There is evidence that various people made allegations and had reported them in the United States and in Rome. What has gone wrong? We deserve to find out. If the news is damaging, we have to hope it will damage and then help to correct an allegedly corrupt process.

I have been trying to frame my disgust, anger and sorrow in some graced way. I may have been given a path in St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 7. He had saddened some people by a letter containing his frank criticism of them.

"You were filled with sorrow that came from God. Thus you did not suffer any loss from us. Indeed, sorrow for God's sake produces a repentance without regrets, leading to salvation, whereas worldly sorrow brings death."

I wrote about repentance a few weeks ago (*The Catholic Moment*, July 15). It is a dissatisfaction with something about oneself. In today's context, it applies to the conference of bishops. So I pray that ours will not be a worldly sorrow.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) will have responses to the McCarrick

reports, and whatever surfaces in Pennsylvania. Even so, each bishop is free to speak for himself and we will.

It is not impossible for the conference to hire an outside investigator. This happened in 2002 when the whole body of the USCCB voted to engage the John Jay College of Criminal Justice to research the matter of clergy abuse of minors. That landmark 2004 report is available online.

On July 24, I communicated with our clergy in the diocese regarding the McCarrick “fallout.” I ended with three points:

- The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, Article 17, calls for the ongoing human formation of the clergy with regard to chastity and celibacy. Expect to see this on our future meeting calendar.
- Read the Code of Conduct and the Employee Handbook that are posted on our diocesan Web site. The parts about misconduct or harassment are worth reviewing. Those of us in leadership positions have the responsibility to minimize risks to the well-being and reputations of our co-workers and volunteers, so they can feel safe in their work.
- Be aware that all this news touches on our vocations efforts. It can affect the morale of our seminarians and aspirants to religious life. I am aware that their families will have questions concerning treatment of their sons and daughters. I commend this last point to your prayers.

Let me conclude here by borrowing from a thoughtful preacher. “Concord Pastor” blogged his “loaves and fishes” homily for the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, ending it thus: “Will you pray with me today that Jesus will feed every hunger that is ours and heal and nourish our hungry, wounded, broken, abused Church?”

“And pray with me this morning that in spite of the infidelity of some, we will remain faithful, faithful to the One who is ever faithful to us.”