

Remarks from Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSpS, at Jan. 31 release of Report on Child Sexual Abuse by Clergy in the Archdiocese of San Antonio

People of God in the Archdiocese of San Antonio,

I am reminded of an event that occurred at this time of year in 2012. I gathered with the Catholic community of Comfort, Texas, for an outdoor Mass, preparing for a new church there.

It was a cold day, and a bitter wind stripped the cloths off the altar, which had been placed on two flatbed trucks. But that did not stop us; we kept going.

Several people came up to hold the cloth down for the rest of the Mass, to protect the Body and Blood of Christ, to celebrate worthily the sacred mysteries. They were young and old, middle age and elderly, Hispanic and Anglo; it was a wonderful display of the diversity of our Church. Everyone took their place as they lived their baptismal call as followers of Christ.

Today we gather in a warm space, however, a bitter wind has been sweeping through the Church, causing turmoil, confusion, and anger. Allegations of clerical sexual misconduct and mishandling of some of these cases by bishops are tearing the Church apart, and the challenge for us as Church is to renew our commitment to holiness and justice. We are to bring reconciliation and conversion to our communities of faith as we become instruments of light for the world.

Hope never dies, it keeps us on the move. We experience darkness at night, but in the morning we enjoy the sunrise and a new dawn. Light overcomes the darkness.

Big announcements such as this can bring tension and pain. But at this time I am also filled with serenity and peace, as I know the Holy Spirit is leading these efforts at renewal and reflection as we move forward in faith and love as an archdiocese.

We began last fall to compile a comprehensive list of those priests and deacons who have credible allegations of sexually abusing children, and this announcement does not bring an end to that process; it will continue. We know there is still significant work to be done.

As a Church, we have made meaningful progress, especially since the establishment of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People in the Church, which was promulgated in 2002. Our research shows that during the past 10 years, since 2010, there have been no reported allegations which might have occurred during that decade, and between the

years 2000 to 2009 there were only two allegations which were made and the clergy removed and prosecuted by law enforcement. This is a sign that all of the actions that we have made since the 2002 Charter and continue to take to this day are making a positive impact on ensuring the faithfulness of the leadership of the Church.

This report identifies all known allegations of clergy sexual abuse of minors in the Archdiocese since 1940, not only credible allegations. In a few cases, where the allegation was found not to be credible, the allegations were identified without naming the clerics who were accused.

During each Mass, in the Eucharistic prayer before humble gifts of bread and wine are miraculously transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, the priest says the words, “It is truly right and just.” What we are doing here is also, “truly right and just,” most especially for the survivors of sexual abuse by clergy.

The Archdiocese is profoundly aware that this report may well cause some further grief to survivors of clergy sexual abuse as minors, or even those who have been abused by others when they were children. We pray that this report will indeed assist survivors who have not felt attended to or who even ignored by family or the Church. It is our hope that they will find peace.

The oldest allegation containing in our report was brought to us by the survivor 60 years after the alleged incident occurred. In such cases, there are truly not enough times that we, and I, can express contrition, regret, and remorse to this person, who carried this unbearable pain and burden for many decades. The justifiable anger from the survivors and the faithful regarding how these allegations were at times handled in the past is rational and understandable; and we must bear this burden going forward. While the report is difficult to read in many sections, I can also say there were situations when I was edified by the actions of many priests and church leaders who did the right thing and were courageous in making decisions that were difficult and unpopular. Many of these good leaders are deceased, and I surely believe they have received their reward in heaven.

Holy Father Francis, in a letter last August condemning the crime of priestly sexual abuse, its cover-up, and demanding accountability, wrote, “An awareness of sin helps us to acknowledge the errors, the crimes and wounds caused in the past and allows us, in the present, to be more open and committed along a journey of renewed conversion.”

He also, as I do, begged forgiveness for the pain suffered by victims, and lamented that a clerical culture greatly contributed to this crisis, with leaders in the Church more concerned about reputation and taboos than the safety of children.

“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,” Francis wrote.

And just last week, at World Youth Day in Panama, the Holy Father spoke about the importance of ensuring that all the victims of the sexual abuse crisis are heard, and that the Church is committed to support them, that the Church is committed to walk with them, and we have done it.

The pontiff continues to urge victims to not be afraid to come forward, and I too echo that call. We will continue to look for direction from Pope Francis.

We here in San Antonio, and the prelates of all the dioceses of Texas, are each doing what we believe is right regarding our reports. Each diocese is approaching the release of their report in their own way, in different forms and fashions. Each bishop is following their own conscience, and doing the best job they can.

Later today, the Independent Lay Commission will release its own assessment of our report, and I look forward to learning their recommendations and reading their review of our processes and procedures. I want to thank the members of that group for the time and expertise that they have contributed to make the parishes and schools of the Archdiocese of San Antonio the safe environments that they always should be.

In addition, I want to express my profound gratitude to the members of the Archdiocesan Review Board and its predecessor, the Crisis Intervention Committee, for their decades of hard work, and to the laity, who have brought to me their comments and ideas concerning the handling of clerical sexual abuse allegations.

I pledge, as does Pope Francis, that we will not minimize or hide from claims of clergy sexual abuse of minors. While we have made great strides, there is no such thing as a tolerable level of abuse. Francis reminds us, “Even if it was just one priest who abused a boy or a girl, this is atrocious, because that man was chosen by God. It is most scandalous, because the Church should bring people to God and not destroy them.”

In the spirit of a penitential liturgy, as our parishioners will experience this weekend, our deacons and priests are owning the sins and failures of the church, and recommitting themselves to serve the people of God in courage and fidelity.

With the transparency and reckoning that this report offers, I desire that all in church leadership, and in particular my brothers, our priests, will find a renewed call to service, love, and holiness.

I ask our Blessed Mother may she help us -- just as she took care of Jesus -- that she will help the Church to take care of all our little ones. Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us; St. Anthony of Padua, pray for us.

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