

US bishops express anguish over abuse reports, encourage change in Church

Washington D.C., Aug 17, 2018 / 03:12 pm (CNA/EWTN News) - After a grand jury found thousands of alleged instances of sexual abuse in six of Pennsylvania's Catholic dioceses, numerous U.S. bishops have called for renewal and change in face of these heartbreaking events.

Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles, vice president of U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the Church in the U.S. is in "a sad and confusing time."

In his homily for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Aug. 15, the archbishop asked the Blessed Mother to intercede for greater purity and renewed love inside the Church.

"Let us ask the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary, the Mother of the Church. May she help us to have the courage we need to purify the Church and renew our love for holiness and our devotion to Jesus Christ and his Gospel."

An 884-page grand jury report was released Aug. 14. The report states more than 1,000 victims had been sexually abused by some 300 priests over a span of seven decades. The report also points to the efforts to conceal or ignore the abuse by Church authorities.

Archbishop Gomez said now is the time for prayers and repentance in the Church, encouraging actions of forgiveness and healing.

"This is a time now for prayer and repentance and a time for examining our conscience, especially for those of us who are bishops and priests. And all of us need to pray for every person who has been hurt by the Church, and we need to work to help them heal."

Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia said the report should also ignite a just anger, not an unhealthy rage, and he compared it to Christ's actions toward the moneychangers in the temple.

His archdiocese experienced similar reports on abuse in 2005 and 2011, he said, noting the "The anger Philadelphians felt toward the Archdiocese was likewise well placed." Similarly, he said, this recent event calls for an anger which needs to be controlled and fruitful.

"Anger is also a righteous and necessary response – but it needs to be an anger that bears good fruit; an anger guided by clear thinking, prudence, and a desire for real justice. That kind of anger all of us should feel this week and carry with us into the days ahead."

For his archdiocese, he said, anger motivated change. Since the abuse had been made known, the archdiocese has taught an estimated 100,000 laypeople and clergy to recognize and report abuse.

An Aug. 15 statement from the bishops of New Jersey dioceses acknowledged "that media accounts of the details contained in Pennsylvania's grand jury report show a heartbreaking departure from our fundamental belief in the dignity and value of every child. As a Church, our calling remains unchanged - to help children in our care encounter leaders who exemplify God's commandment to love and protect the most vulnerable."

"As Bishops, we hold that every parent and every child deserve a safe environment to learn and explore their faith. Every space where teaching, worship, and ministry take place must provide this

safe environment. There must be no compromise on this principle. The children entrusted to our care are treasures."

The New Jersey bishops said they will "remain vigilant to ensure that not one child will ever be abused on our watch," adding that the state's dioceses have conducted background checks on all personnel who have regular contact with minors.

"We thank law enforcement agencies, child protection advocates and victims themselves who have helped us move beyond compliance to creating the safest environments for learning and worship. We are deeply thankful for those who have joined our efforts to extend both healing and hope to every victim and their family. We renew our commitment to foster healing and seek forgiveness."

The bishops of New Jersey's dioceses urged "anyone who was abused by clergy to come forward to civil authorities."

Cardinal Seán O'Malley of Boston said that while many sexual offenders have answered for their crimes, there are areas in need of improvement.

"While many perpetrators have been held accountable in one way or another for their crimes, we have yet to establish clear and transparent systems of accountability and consequence for Church leadership whose failures have allowed these crimes to occur."

"The Church must embrace spiritual conversion and demand legal transparency and pastoral accountability for all who carry out its mission," he added. "The way we prepare priests, the way we exercise pastoral leadership and the way we cooperate with civil authorities; all these have to be consistently better than has been the case."

This will not be an easy task, admitted the cardinal. He said Catholics and others in society are frustrated with Church leadership. However, he promised there is still hope.

"I am not without hope and do not succumb to despondent acceptance that our failures cannot be corrected. As the Church we have the responsibility to help people not to lose hope, that was Jesus' message to all those he ministered to, especially in times of great trial."

"There is too much good in the Church and in our faith to lose hope. Often it is survivors who courageously teach us we cannot lose hope."