

Dear Parishioners of Holy Spirit Catholic Church,

*“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,-it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matthew 18:5-6).*

I am sorry that I am not with you this weekend of all weekends. I want to convey to you, in my words, as your pastor, the seriousness of the crime of child sexual abuse and the problem of not stopping any type of abuse as soon as possible. I started with the above quote by Jesus Christ to emphasize there is no gray area when it comes to child abuse.

As I mentioned on Wednesday, child predator behavior, is not a simple one time mistake or temptation, it is premeditated. In fact there are typically many obsessive premeditated actions. A predator sets his or her stage by meticulously arranging a relationship of trust with the ultimate desired outcome of an exclusive meeting where they can abuse.

When hearing about abuse, many naïve or inexperienced yet good-willed people assess abuse as being as serious as the worst thing the victim has explained to them, but those with more experience of helping survivors know that abusers will almost always offend their victims again and in a more severe way unless it is stopped. This is not only true for child sexual abuse but also for all abuse including domestic violence.

Embarrassment, horror, betrayal, mourning, and numbness might be some words to describe your emotions this week. These reactions are not sinful but rather justified. Two of the beatitudes from the sermon on the mount are: Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted and blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled, I share with you in those feelings. I encourage you to direct some of your discomfort as an offering to God for the healing of all victims of abuse, especially those abused by priests.

The number of victims of priests from the 1940's to present in the state of Pennsylvania speaks volumes. Pray for them. While it is difficult to watch the news at this time, I hope your heightened awareness of this prevalence of abuse increases your amount of prayer for victims, children, and the Church. Many victims need your prayers. According to Pennsylvania's State Police annual report for Megan's law there were 32,051 total offenders registered in PA in 2016. It is an important duty for all citizens and law enforcement to stay vigilant and I am thankful for our police and other public institution's continuing efforts to take child abuse seriously.

While I'm sorry I am not with you this weekend, I am happy to be renewing my parents wedding vows for their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. My mother is a retired school teacher and my father is retired from the Office of the Attorney General where he was Deputy Chief in charge of the Bureau of Investigative Services. I am proud that the Office of the Attorney General has always taken child sexual abuse seriously. As we know from the Catholic Diocese's Grand Jury Report, the office has continued to increase its resources into fighting abuse. Part of my father's job at the OAG was to give technical support to the Child Predator Unit since its creation in 2005. The creation of this unit was a good evolution of our government as we as a society were giving the problem of abuse more and more necessary awareness and attention.

Our Diocese has also grown in its relationship with law enforcement. You can read in sections of the Grand Jury Report the dates when certain priests were reported to the proper District Attorney's office. I am very thankful to our Diocese for making these reports over the last several decades when they did. In a similar way, many of you have become mandated reporters and have gone through Youth Protection training so that you can recognize abuse. Thank you for sacrificing your time to do this through our Diocese!

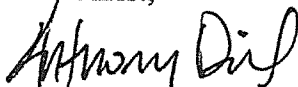
There is no excuse for any priest to abuse a child. There are too many instances in the Grand Jury Report where a lack of action enabled more abuse. I know we are all disheartened that this happened on several occasions in the past.

I am ultimately thankful for the publication of this report because while the leadership of the Catholic Church in Pennsylvania has been changing its way of operating to give children greater protection and has been reporting to law enforcement over the past decades, the type of trauma this report has caused might be the only way to ensure that we will not forget the seriousness of the sin of child sexual abuse and consequently keep vigilant of each other in the future.

With all of this happening and the shame brought to the church right now I want to tell you all that I personally still feel honored to be a priest. I feel affirmed in my vocation—that its real and that I am supposed to be here at this time in 2018. Even though we have seen what great sinfulness priests are capable of, I still feel pangs of awe that I am allowed to consecrate the Eucharist and hear Confessions. While you might not be sure about the Catholic Church right now, I hope you feel affirmed in your vocation to holiness and remember the experiences of God you have had in your life.

If you wish to report abuse please call the PA child abuse hotline: 1-800-932-0313 and in the case of a Diocesan employee 1-800-626-1608.

In Christ,



Fr. Anthony

**Prayer for the healing of victims of abuse.**

God of endless love,  
ever caring, ever strong,  
always present, always just:  
You gave your only Son  
to save us by the blood of his cross.  
Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace,  
join to your own suffering  
the pain of all who have been hurt  
in body, mind, and spirit  
by those who betrayed the trust placed in them.

Hear our cries as we agonize over the harm done  
to our brothers and sisters.

Breathe wisdom into our prayers,  
soothe restless hearts with hope,  
steady shaken spirits with faith:  
Show us the way to justice and wholeness,  
enlightened by truth and enfolded in your mercy.

Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts,  
heal your people's wounds  
and transform our brokenness.  
Grant us courage and wisdom, humility and grace,  
so that we may act with justice  
and find peace in you.  
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.