

## DIAGNOSIS PRECEDES THE CURE: REBUILDING TRUST AND FAITH

Every so often, I try to imagine a scenario in the secular world and then consider how it likely applies to perceptions of the Catholic Church today. Having served as a priest going on three decades, the Church *milieu* is part of my DNA and not one easily turned off. For example, I could not help but wonder how many young adults today view the Church in essentially the same manner in which I viewed the Oscars on Sunday night—namely, out of sight, out of mind? Is the Church as **utterly irrelevant** to them as last Sunday's Academy Awards ceremony was to me? If so, we are in deep trouble! **Credibility** in the Catholic Church is critical to her future. Gravely sinful past actions combined with a lack of transparency and accountability in the present have necessitated a Herculean effort to recover of any modicum of credibility. Yet, as priests, that is our task ahead, and one from which I will not shy. Part of that process of regaining trust includes fully grasping the reality of our current situation.

Last Friday evening, I attended a gathering for priests held at **Saint Peter Catholic Church in Mendota**. It was appropriate that the evening was held at the **first parish** to be established in this area. Its historical roots are deep, beginning in 1840, one year prior to establishment of the little log chapel on the banks of the Mississippi river that later would become our first Cathedral. The Catholic Faith has deep and strong local roots, and the Church's contributions have been significant. So too, sadly, has been the harm inflicted on some of her most vulnerable members. The purpose of the evening was for us to hear the testimony of an extremely **courageous woman** whose sons were abused by a priest. We also heard via video from one of her married adult sons, who shared his powerful story of pain, suffering, searching and finally his grace-filled healing, still a work in progress.

The purpose of their reflections was not to excoriate us, but rather to inform and encourage us. First though, we expressed our willingness to listen to their incredibly painful stories, shared firsthand. Silence fell over the parish social hall as we listened. They did not try to shock us and were incredibly respectful throughout, amazing enough in itself. In many ways, there was an awkward silence, though not an inappropriate one. After all, how does one immediately respond after hearing such powerful testimonies? A question and answer session followed, after which we began a Holy Hour in church led by Archbishop Hebda. It included Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, a Gospel and homily by the Archbishop, the praying of the **Divine Mercy Chaplet** and concluding with Benediction.

There was a marked and appropriate **soberness throughout** the evening, though its purpose was clear. These two courageous people encouraged us to remain steadfast, even as they continue to deal with their pain. They believe that by helping us understand the depth of their ordeal, we will be better equipped to assist others. They even offered tips on how to reach out to abuse victims when we encounter them. Our meeting occurred at the same time as the global summit addressing "The Protection of Minors in the Church." At the Vatican, 114 Presidents of national **Episcopal Conferences** gathered for four days with the Pope. They too heard powerful testimony from survivors. It will take some time to unpack the results of the global Summit, but this much seems clear. For all our historic failures, our local Archdiocese is significantly ahead of the curve in the U.S. with respect to protocols and oversight. And our USCCB policies are more developed than other countries. But protocols aren't enough—they must be accompanied by serious self-reflection.

Accountability, transparency, responsibility...these words have been tossed around freely. They mean little however, absent of concrete data demonstrating their implementation. My father was a physician and one of his greatest strengths in the field was his uncanny ability to properly diagnose. People shared examples with me in which he hypothesized a disease that other physicians had initially missed. The science of medicine must begin with a **proper diagnosis**. Absent that, **the cure will never** take place. Universally, the Catholic Church must correctly diagnose the **roots of the problem** before we will ever successfully implement a cure. Statistics don't lie: the vast majority (81%) of cases of priestly sexual abuse involve **male victims, 77.4% of whom** are between 11 and 17 years of age.

Many observant Catholics share with me both their puzzlement and disappointment at the hesitancy of Church leaders to acknowledge any relationship between a homosexual sub-culture within the ranks of the Catholic clergy and the phenomenon of sexual abuse of minors and seminarians. Tragically, the McCarrick case involved both. As I wrote early last August, a **full accounting** of his case is critical for the re-establishment of trust. Clergy and lay faithful alike are still waiting. I pray we together will **not stop demanding** full transparency. Don't take your foot off the pedal! The laity must play a central role in rebuilding trust in the Church. Please know that your continued prayers for priests mean the world to us.

- Last Sunday's snow certainly impacted weekend Mass attendance. If you were unable to attend, I urge your support of the **Catholic Services Appeal**. Envelopes are in the pews, and they may be placed in with the regular Sunday stewardship collection.
- Bravo! The **Health and Human Services Department** issued a policy that bars taxpayer-funded family planning clinics from making abortion referrals. The Trump Administration's directive echoes President Reagan's actions in the 1980's.
- Incredibly, the Senate fell short of the 60 votes needed to secure passage of the "Born Alive" bill requiring medical care to infants who survive an abortion. **How could anyone** vote against such a bill?
- Lent begins this **Wednesday March 6**. How will you engage the Lenten season this year? Perhaps consider **attending weekday Mass** (at least 2-3 times per week) this year as part of your Lenten resolutions. Ash Wednesday is a day of **fasting and abstinence**. Fasting regulations are listed on page 5 along with Wednesday's schedule.
- A California state senator introduced legislation that would **require** a priest to **violate the seal** of the confessional in suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. This type of attack on the autonomy of the Church is happening with ever increasing frequency. Canon Law 983 §1 states: "The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore it is absolutely forbidden for a confessor to betray in any way a penitent in words or in any manner."
- If I asked you which country boasts the highest percentage of Catholics, you would surely respond "Vatican City State." And you would be correct. But do you know which country is ranked #2? A: **East Timor!** The former Portuguese colony comes in at **97% Catholic**.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel  
Rector