

“FACING OUR SOCIETAL DEMONS” FOSTERING A RESPECTFUL ENVIRONMENT

The headlines of late have been eerily familiar...one leading figure after another is accused of wrongdoing amidst open discussion of cover-ups and backroom secret files and deals, etc. While they mostly deal with sexual harassment, I cannot escape the fact that this is a déjà vu moment from 2002 when the sexual abuse scandal was exploding in the Archdiocese of Boston. Those revelations, brought to light by the Boston Globe, would change forever the Catholic Church in this country. The U.S. Catholic Bishops summer meeting, which happened to be held in Dallas that summer, was singularly devoted to the crisis. In short order, the bishops approved the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People,” commonly known ever since as the “Dallas Charter.” This would become the guiding document to this day (revised in 2011) for the handling of sexual abuse allegations and complaints. Would such a document have been written, if not for the Boston Globe? The exploding crisis resulted in collective action.

Prior to 2002, no Catholic would have attended a **Virtus** session, watched videos on safe environment protocols or been subjected to a background check as a volunteer Religious Education teacher, etc. There were some discussions in seminaries about appropriate boundaries, but not nearly as comprehensive as they are today. The scandal was a wake-up call far beyond the Catholic Church, in fact. At the time, there were no required background checks for adult leaders in the Boy Scouts of America. Today, they have comprehensive guidelines in place. When volunteers seek approval to volunteer for a program in a school or parish other than their home parish, the paperwork involved at times presents significant challenges. We have experienced that here with **Project Home**, an interfaith initiative. Still, I cannot imagine the alternative and am amazed at how much has changed in our Church culture since 2002. Priests and lay parish staff alike are extremely prudent about our interactions and are aware that in this heightened culture, every action takes on added significance.

Though they differ from the issue of the abuse of minors, the current revelations about workplace harassment that are flooding the media are extremely serious in their own right. Clearly, the steady stream of allegations reveals what undoubtedly has been bubbling beneath the surface for years. It took some brave women to step forward and some sharp reporters to verify facts. Suddenly, the floodgates opened. It is worth examining our collective consciences. What has given rise to such disrespect for women at work? Obviously, I am not involved in the workplace environment of the media, politics or entertainment. I do not swim in those waters and am at a loss to comprehend workplace situations as described of late. It is as if we were watching a Hollywood film, except that this is real, not a script.

But have you noticed the relatively sparse mention about one key reality surrounding the vast majority of these accused men—namely that they are married? Not **were**, but **are** married. As a nation, we must recover our respect for the **sanctity of marriage** and of pre-marital chastity. For people of faith, the knowledge of our own fallen humanity remains ever before our eyes. We can never be naïve enough to think that “all is fixed,” or that the box under “completed tasks” has been checked. Absolutely not. This will never be the case because, once again, **Original Sin** makes its presence known. The human condition changed forever with our first parents in the Garden of Eden. Our Catechism teaches: “Yet no one can escape the experience of suffering or the evils in nature which seem to be linked to the limitations proper to creatures: and above all to the question of moral evil. Where does evil come from? “I sought whence evil comes and there was no solution,” said St. Augustine...” (CCC # 385, cf. Augustine, *Confessions*. 7,7,11). Evil remains an unfathomable mystery, but one we must confront in faith and hope.

Let me be clear. The abuse crisis in the Church has without question—it’s not even close—been the single most difficult experience for the People of God to endure in my more than 28 years of priestly service. It is shameful, embarrassing—feel free to throw in a few additional choice adjectives to describe its deleterious effects on the morale of the faithful. It has been devastating on clergy, religious and laity alike. Having written that, it is equally clear to me that it is **not** business as usual any longer. I believe that the **Church has worked diligently** to effect substantive change, even as I readily acknowledge that to fully regain trust may well not occur even in my lifetime. It cannot happen overnight; it will take time. But I very much believe that the faithful who have remained active in their faith are sensing that it is no longer “the same old story,” but that real change has

indeed been taking place.

Just as the Church has been forced to “face its demons,” so too in other arenas of society. May these latest revelations neither paralyze us, nor cause us to lose hope. Rather, may they motivate us to instill respect for women early on in the education of our own children. May we foster a tremendous respect for the sacred institution of marriage, seeing it as an asset to a society, not as an irrelevant societal institution. When I complete marriage preparation with an engaged couple, I hand them a signed and notarized document that they can present to the County courthouse when they acquire their license. That letter certifies that they have undergone at least 12 hours of pre-marriage counseling. The couple is eligible to receive a significant discount in the license fee, from \$115 to \$40. Why does Ramsey County care? Because it is in the best interests of civil government to have stable marriages. That stability leads to stable families, which leads to a stable society. The recipe for success is there— we need to follow it.

- Calling all families and individuals--we need your help! Our annual **pre-Christmas cleaning** of the Cathedral takes place this coming **Saturday, December 16** from 9:00-10:30 a.m. Together, may this Cathedral shine for Christmas!
- The papal prayer intention for December is directed towards the elderly, imploring God that they “may apply their wisdom and experience to spreading the faith and forming the new generations.” I am deeply edified by the examples of the elderly, our greatest generation, and applaud the Holy Father’s Prayer for them.
- Next weekend we will be taking up our special collection for Christmas flowers. It is an opportunity to make an offering in honor of or in memory of a loved one. All donations are exclusively used to provide flowers in the sanctuary and all chapels during the course of the season and beyond. Thank you!
- The Archdiocese rejoices in the ordination of **ten new permanent deacons** for service in this local Church. Saturday’s ceremony was especially joyous because newly ordained **Deacon Ron Schmitz**, (Holy Trinity Parish in South St. Paul) has been assigned to the Cathedral and will begin serving here shortly. No, Deacon Phil Stewart will not disappear, but Deacon Ron will provide needed help. He is familiar with us, frequently attending daily Mass here.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector