



ROMAN CATHOLIC  
**DIOCESE of  
SPRINGFIELD-CAPE GIRARDEAU**

*Office of the Bishop*

Dear Faithful of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau—

Let me begin by saying I love the Church and everything about Her. I love the Sacraments, our theology, our saints, the Blessed Mother, our liturgical year, our prayers, our devotions and feasts, and our architecture, just to name a few. Because of this great love, I have given my life to the Church. And because of this great love, I am devastated by the recent Pennsylvania Grand Jury revelations of sexual abuse and the subsequent cover-up from the highest levels of our Church, as I am sure you are too.

The reality is that because of the ecclesial misdeeds perpetrated against children and vulnerable adults, many have been physically, sexually, or emotionally scarred. And when they cried out for help, bishops ignored those cries. The very Church they believed in, the priests and bishops they trusted with their salvation and as guides in the faith, ended up betraying them and afflicting unspeakable harm. They then harmed them further through their silence and inaction. If you weren't aware, most of the discussion in the Pennsylvania report concerns abuses before the early 2000s. By finding almost no cases after 2002, the Grand Jury's conclusions are consistent with previous studies showing that Catholic Church reforms in the United States drastically reduced the incidence of clergy child abuse. That does not mean there is not more work to be done.

The Holy See has encouraged continued reform and vigilance at all levels of the Catholic Church, to help ensure the protection of minors and vulnerable adults from harm. As Pope Francis said this week in his letter to the faithful, "Looking back to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient.

Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated.”

As your shepherd, I am sorry for any hurt inflicted upon anyone in the Diocese. I apologize, publicly, to any individual who has been harmed by someone entrusted with their care, and who has suffered in silence. I can assure you that as your Bishop I pledge my commitment to combat every form of abuse. I humbly beg your forgiveness of our Church and ask you to pray for our Diocese and myself as the Church seeks to heal these wounds and takes actions to prevent them from happening again. I am committed to breaking the dark cloak of mishandling and silence and will take measurable steps toward healing.

### **At home**

After the revelations in Pennsylvania, people are wondering, “What about us, the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau?” The Diocese is currently aware of nine priests who are no longer in active ministry with credible allegations of abuse against a minor and all of these had been previously reported. The Diocese’s policy on sexual abuse is very clear: a report of these allegations is made to law enforcement; our internal Diocesan Review Board reviews the allegation; and pastoral care and counseling are offered to the alleged victim.

Our Holy Father encouraged us this week to give witness—in action—to a “culture of care that says ‘never again’ to every form of abuse.” This calls for both personal and communal conversion that enables us the strength, heart, grace, and courage necessary to truly be Thy Brother’s Keeper.

In order to take action to be accountable and insure accuracy, transparency, and truthfulness, I am calling for an independent review of all Diocesan personnel files, clerical, religious, and lay staff. Once we have completed this process and in consultation with our Safe Environment Review Board, the Diocese will issue the findings. Be assured that we are actively engaged in creating environments and

reporting mechanisms so that both children and adults are safe and free from abuse, trauma, or injury, and may successfully report any instance of misconduct and be confident in our swift action.

While our policies and procedures carefully outline our expectations, the ramifications, and consequences if there are violations, no piece of paper can take the place of a vigilant adult who takes to heart their role in keeping people safe: children and adults alike.

One who is called to action when he or she has reason to suspect abuse, whether with a child or another adult. We must live the zero-tolerance we profess. We do this by the active participation of all the members of the Body of Christ.

The annual diocesan Code of Conduct that is signed by every clergy, employee, and volunteer has as its top priority procedures for reporting abuse. We have clear, swift, and immediate actions that take place when allegations are made. I ask that all members of the community embrace this important mission.

In the interest of openness, I do want to disclose that we recently placed a pastor on administrative leave for sexual misconduct with an adult over the Internet. The Diocese also just became aware of a lawsuit that alleges a former employee made inappropriate advances on an adult, and we are investigating those allegations.

I hope this reassures you that we are following our policies and procedures, and I encourage anyone to notify the Diocese and law enforcement if they have any claims of sexual abuse or misconduct against our religious or lay staff. Just this past year, William Holtmeyer, Jr., MS, NCC, LPC, CEAP, Director of the Office of Child and Youth included several specific “red flag” behaviors to our Safe Environment Procedures, behaviors that include, for example, issues of exploitation and enticement. We have in place a Safe Student Policy Addressing Harassment, Discrimination, and Violence by Employees, Other Students, and Third Parties. We must stand united in this work.

## **Upcoming Healing Masses**

This past March and May, I celebrated “Healing Masses” in New Madrid and Poplar Bluff respectively. Additional Masses are planned at St. Agnes Cathedral, in Springfield, on Sept. 25, at 7 p.m., and St. Peter the Apostle Parish, in Joplin, on Oct. 8, also at 7 p.m.

Please consider attending one of these upcoming liturgies as a sign of support to those who have been harmed. Our ultimate goal is healing and restoring trust. The Church belongs to Christ. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. With the active participation of each one of us, the renewal of his Church will be successful in creating the necessary dynamics for sound and lasting change. Please join me in uniting your prayers and sacrifices with Christ and the entire Church for the healing of those who have been abused, for a greater fidelity to Christ’s teachings, and for an increase in holiness. That can only happen with an honest conversation about the root causes of this crisis, and through the purification the Lord wants for his Church.

As Pope Francis has said, “...May the Holy Spirit grant us the grace of conversion and the interior anointing needed to express before these crimes of abuse our compunction and our resolve courageously to combat them.” The complete text of Pope Francis’ letter can be found on the Diocesan Website at: [www.dioscg.org](http://www.dioscg.org).

Come Holy Spirit!

The Most Rev. Edward M. Rice

Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau

August 20, 2018