



***Ten Years Later – Reflections on the Sexual Abuse Crisis
in the Archdiocese of Boston***
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The life of the Church in the Archdiocese of Boston (and throughout the world) was forever changed by the revelations of clergy sexual abuse that dominated the news in January of 2002. Since that time much has happened in the Church and in society concerning recognition of the sexual abuse of minors, confronting these crimes and instituting protections to prevent these tragic violations of innocence from ever happening again. At this time, with a spirit of contrition and humility, with a commitment to vigilance and with gratitude for all who have given their time and effort to ensure that such abuse never again occur in the Church, we offer our reflections on the journey of the past decade.

I. The Survivors

The survivors of clergy sexual abuse, with their families and loved ones, must always be the central focus of all dimensions of our ongoing response to the crisis. Their courage in coming forward and sharing the accounts of their abuse has been of immeasurable help to so many who tragically shared that terrible experience. The survivors' strength in proclaiming the truth allowed others to acknowledge their own pain and take steps to begin healing.

It is indisputable that the survivors of clergy sexual abuse have suffered greatly. As an Archdiocese, as a Church, we can never cease to make clear the depth of our sorrow and to beg forgiveness from those who were so grievously harmed. We also must acknowledge and express our gratitude for all that survivors and their loved ones have done, and continue to do, to help make the Church, and all of society, safer for children. We are humbled as many survivors have offered forgiveness to the Church and encouraged others to re-establish their relationship with the God who offers all of us the gifts of love and healing.

It is our hope that survivors and their families will be able to consider the words of Pope Benedict XVI concerning their participation in the life of the Church. "It is in the communion of the Church that we encounter the person of Jesus Christ, who was himself a victim of injustice and sin. Like you, he still bears the wounds of his own unjust suffering. He understands the depths of your pain and its enduring effect upon your lives and your relationships, including your relationship with the Church. I know some of you find it difficult even to enter the doors of a church after all that has occurred. Yet Christ's own wounds, transformed by his redemptive sufferings, are the very means by which the power of evil is broken and we are reborn to life and hope. I believe deeply in the healing power of his self-sacrificing love – even in the darkest and most hopeless situations – to bring liberation and the promise of a new beginning."¹

II. Our Priority

Since the time I was named Archbishop of Boston in July of 2003 our highest priority has been to provide outreach and care for all the survivors of clergy sexual abuse and to do everything possible to make sure this abuse never happens again. This priority will be central to all of our efforts going forward; all initiatives, plans, and programs will be structured with reference to outreach and care for survivors and the protection of children.

With the assistance of those who oversee the Archdiocese's Office for Pastoral Support and Outreach, it has been my privilege and a source of great humility to meet with hundreds of survivors and their families. Their voices, stories, faces, and tears have helped me to understand how deeply those who were abused and their families and loved ones were harmed. Some of the most deeply moving moments have been meetings with families who have lost loved ones who were abused, to suicide or drug overdose. Our having prayed for peace and for the repose of the souls of the departed will be always held in my heart and my memory. I have also been deeply moved by meetings with survivors and family members when men and women who have suffered the most egregious abuse shared that they are striving each day to forgive the man who perpetrated the abuse. This is an extraordinary and humbling sign of God's goodness beyond all measure, and a message of courage, hope and love

Survivors have made clear that the Church must do everything possible to make sure that what happened to them never happens again. On behalf of the entire Church, I pledge our vigilance as we continue to help those that had been harmed. One of our most important efforts has been to provide outreach and care to survivors and their families. Through the Office of Pastoral Support and Outreach (OPSO), the Archdiocese of Boston continues to reach out to all who have been hurt by clergy sexual abuse. OPSO has met with over 1,000 survivors and family members. As one measure of our commitment, during the past seven years, the Archdiocese has spent more than \$7 million to provide counseling, medicines, and other services for survivors and their families. At any given time, we are providing assistance for approximately 300 people.

III. The Church's Response

In order to address the importance of the spiritual dimension of our need for forgiveness and healing, we have held prayer services and Masses in parishes that experienced an especially painful history of sexual abuse of children. The parish visits include those made during the *Pilgrimage of Repentance and Hope* as part of the Novena to the Holy Spirit in May 2006. Many of the priests, deacons, religious and faithful of the Archdiocese joined me at the very moving services of the Novena as we turned to the Lord seeking healing and forgiveness. When Pope Benedict XVI visited the United States in the spring of 2008 we were able to provide five survivors of clergy sexual abuse the opportunity to personally meet with him. At that time the Pope heard the survivors' stories, shared with each of them his expression of sorrow on behalf of the Universal Church, and prayed with them for their healing.

In conjunction with our ongoing efforts to respond to the needs of the survivors and their loved ones, we continue to make it a priority to resolve claims of clergy sexual abuse pending against the Archdiocese of Boston. Since 2003, the Archdiocese of Boston has settled approximately 800 claims of clergy sexual abuse.²

In order to provide children with protection now and in the future we have established safe-environment education and prevention programs in all of the Archdiocese of Boston's parishes and schools. We want to help parents and all those involved in pastoral work to recognize the signs of abuse and to take appropriate measures. Approximately 300,000 children have received safe environment training through their parish schools or religious education programs and approximately 175,000 adults - including diocesan and religious order priests, deacons, candidates for ordination at Archdiocesan seminaries and in diaconate formation, educators, employees, parents and volunteers - have been trained to identify and report suspected abuse. Children are using the skills learned to come forward and report abusive situations and receive the help they need. Since the safety programs began, 575 reports of child abuse or neglect (51A reports) have been filed with the Department of Children and Families (formerly Dept. of Social Services) by our parishes and schools. The majority of the reports were made as a result of a child self-disclosing the abuse to someone in the parish or school. In almost all of the cases, the abuse involved someone in the child's family, a neighbor, other children, or an adult known to the child.

Our policies and practices include working with law enforcement agencies and community professionals to report and investigate instances of sexual abuse. Further, the Archdiocese of Boston conducts more than 60,000 CORI checks annually for Archdiocesan and religious priests, deacons, educators, volunteers and other personnel working with children.

We have also strengthened our priestly formation and assignment standards and protocols. The candidate screening process in our Vocations Office and seminaries is the strongest possible, with particular attention to any issues related to child safety. We have implemented fully the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*³ as agreed to by the United States Bishops Conference in June 2002. Annually the Archdiocese of Boston is also audited by an independent firm to ensure our compliance with the Charter.⁴

Although we have made much progress over the past ten years, we do not mark this anniversary as a time to congratulate ourselves on our achievements. Rather, we must mark this moment by renewing our full commitment to continuous vigilance for the safety of children.

IV. The Priests of the Archdiocese

Reviewing the experiences of the past ten years, it must also be acknowledged that the good and faithful priests of the Archdiocese have suffered greatly because of the sins and crimes of those who abused children. One effect of the abuse scandal is that many people view a priest's Roman collar and clerical appearance with suspicion. It has been painful for our dedicated, faithful priests to see seminary classmates and other colleagues accused of terrible violations of trust and, as well, to live with the fear that a false allegation could remove them from ministry and destroy their reputation. We are greatly indebted to the priests that have cared for the Catholic community, ensuring that all our people are safe and feel safe, by leading the implementation of the safe environment trainings in the parishes and ministries.

V. The Parishes of the Archdiocese

We must also acknowledge and give thanks for the assistance of so many volunteers at the parishes and agencies. The widespread educational and prevention programs launched throughout the Archdiocese of Boston required leaders at the parish level to step forward and be trained so that they could then train others. Many volunteered to serve on boards to assist with implementation, monitoring and prevention activities. And more than 150,000 catechists and volunteers participated in this training and incorporated the recommended approaches and materials, despite the sensitivity of the issue. Through their dedication, our parishes and schools are safe places for children to grow in their faith and love of God.

At this time it is important that we recognize that all Catholics, those who continue to be present at their parishes for the celebration of the Eucharist and those who have felt the need to step away during recent years, have carried the burden of the anger, shame and confusion of this scandal. It is also important to recognize that our Catholic community is an essential part of our ongoing response. Through prayer, support of our faithful priests, contributions that sustain our parishes and central ministries and understanding of the changes needed to ensure a safe environment for all people, our brothers and sisters in Christ allow us to carry on the mission of Jesus Christ, bringing hope and healing to a troubled world. As we move forward, efforts to reach out to all those who are absent from the Church community and the sacraments will be critical to reuniting our Catholic family at Sunday Mass.

VI. The Media

There has been much commentary on the role of the media in bringing the clergy sexual abuse crisis to the attention of the Catholic community and society at large. The media helped make our Church safer for children by raising up the issue of clergy sexual abuse and forcing us to deal with it. All of us who hold the protection of children as the highest priority are indebted to the media's advocacy on this issue.

Going forward, we would be greatly assisted by the media, universities, and all those that study the issue of sexual abuse of minors contextualizing the problem in the manner that will be most helpful for the church and society. The John Jay Reports, issued in 2006 and 2011, make clear that most of the abuse of minors by priests took place in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. If the impression is created that the abuse is current or recent, Catholics and the general public are led to view priests with suspicion and presume that Church environments are not as safe as the facts indicate they are.

Recent news stories about the sexual abuse of minors at university athletic programs and summer camps, among others, clearly show that the crime of sexual abuse of minors occurs in many trusted environments where children are present. The more the media and universities can present the problem of the sexual abuse of minors accurately, transparently and with appropriate context, the safer children will be in all environments as a result of increased attention and strengthened policies.

VII. The Archdiocese's Commitment to Vigilance

While much progress has been made in responding to the sexual abuse of minors in the Church, the task is never complete. We pledge our ongoing commitment to provide care to survivors and their families and pledge our vigilance to ensure the safety of children in the Church and elsewhere. We will continue to work toward promoting effective policies that protect children in

the universal Church. At the last international meeting of Cardinals, I advocated that many of the policies we have adopted in the United States be implemented by bishops' conferences throughout the world. Last year, at a gathering for over 70 Capuchin bishops, I continued this advocacy. As we know all too well, the scourge of sexual abuse of minors is a worldwide issue. The Church has learned much over these many years. We believe that other institutions and organizations can benefit from our learning and we stand ready to work with these institutions for the protection of children

Our Church will never forget the clergy sexual abuse crisis. The traumatic and painful days we experienced ten years ago rightfully forced us to address the issue honestly and implement many necessary changes. We will always focus on the protection of children with the utmost seriousness and gravity.

We are a church called to Mission. While always caring for survivors and making the Church the safest environment for everyone, we look to the future with the hope that God will bring good out of this situation and offer hope and healing to all those affected by the crisis.

God made us to know, love and serve him and wants us to love and care for each other. As Catholics we do this best when we are united around the altar for Mass each Sunday. It is our prayer that by seeing the response of the Church, and by viewing the issue in its proper context, all those who have been away will return to join with us, to make the Church stronger and always a safe place for all people. This past decade has been difficult for the Church. Yet, we are transformed by the experience and the mission endures. Please pray for continued healing for all those impacted and join with us as we strive to bring the light of Christ's healing, love and hope to the world.

¹ Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland. 19 March 2010.

² As part of our commitment to financial transparency, the Archdiocese of Boston also publishes annually on our website (BostonCatholic.org) a clear explanation of the financial costs incurred in settling sexual abuse claims and how they have been paid to date.

³ <http://usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/upload/Charter-for-the-Protection-of-Children-and-Young-People-revised-2011.pdf>

⁴ 2011 version of the letter: <http://www.bostoncatholic.org/Utility/News-And-Press/Content.aspx?id=20242>