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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:


The message which rings forth throughout the 50 days of Easter, and indeed is celebrated through every liturgical season, is that Christ has risen from the dead. In the resurrection, life is shown to be stronger than death; God transforms darkness into light, despair into hope. Life and love have the last word. In the paschal mystery, we see the face of God, and – in the words of Thomas Merton – what we see is *mercy within mercy within mercy*. This is the *Word of Life* at the heart of the Gospel; Jesus has *come that we may have life, and have it to the full* (Jn 10:10); he has come that *his own joy might be in us, so that our joy might be complete* (Jn 15:11). This is the message the Church was called into being to incarnate, in its proclamation, its sacraments, its ministry, its whole life.

The tragedy of sexual abuse in the Church speaks an entirely different message, one which contradicts and undermines the Gospel message. Over the past weeks and months, we have heard repeatedly about how in various parts of the world, some priests have sexually abused those entrusted to their care, and how Church leaders have not always dealt properly with such cases. While many of these cases are in the past, when they have not been properly addressed, they still remain with us, and evoke responses of frustration, dismay and anger. Some have felt the temptation, on the one hand, to lose confidence in the Church, or on the other hand, to be highly critical of the media for an exaggerated focus on the Church when sexual abuse is a reality in all of society. How are we, as an Easter people who trust in God's faithfulness and mercy, to respond to this present situation? How can we attend to the cries of victims, address openly the challenges with which we are confronted, and respond in a Christ-like manner?

First, we cannot be faithful to Christ and close our ears to the pain and suffering of others; this is always true, but profoundly so when that suffering comes from the most vulnerable within our faith communities. In the words of St. Paul, as Church, we are Christ's body. *If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it* (1 Cor 12:26). Children hold a special place in a faith community. Each child, created in God's image, is also a sign of God's continuing desire that we live, an instance of the ongoing miracle in time that God brings forth life from us, that God is doing something new. We baptize infants in part because we want them to be immersed in God's love, wrapped in hope, cradled in tenderness and goodness.

The sexual abuse of minors in the Church is a complete contradiction of what the Church is and what it is summoned to be. In recent years we have come to know more about the destructive long-term effects of such abuse, which violates the life and being of the victim. Hence our first concern must always be for those who have been abused: to listen to them, to validate their experience, to reassure them of God's merciful presence, to assist in whatever way possible to help diminish their suffering and move towards healing.

An intrinsic part of that healing needs to come through our ongoing commitment to transparency and accountability in handling cases of abuse within the Church. Jesus says that *there is nothing that is concealed that will not be revealed* (Mt 10:26), and assures us that *the truth will set us free* (Jn 8:32).

 In all things we are *rooted in Christ*,
in His desire to bring God's love to all peoples.

April 30, 2010

Summoned to be recipients and stewards of God's mercy, we have nothing to fear and much to gain in facing the truth, in all its complexity, with courage and trust.

The Church is growing in understanding, and has made significant progress - as has society at large - in addressing the issue of abuse. On an international level, Pope Benedict XVI has met with and listened to victims of abuse, has challenged Church leaders when they have not applied proper procedures when responding to allegations of abuse, has reiterated the importance of cooperating with civil authorities, and has urged bishops to make determined efforts so that such situations do not arise again.

In Canada, a critical turning point in addressing the damaging reality of sexual abuse was the 1992 Canadian Bishops' statement *From Pain to Hope*. http://www.cccb.ca/site/Files/From_Pain_To_Hope.pdf Locally, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon has over the years developed and refined a set of policies and protocols designed to minimize risk to children and youth, culminating in the 2008 document prepared under the direction of my well-loved predecessor, Bishop Albert LeGatt, entitled *Working Together for a Safe and Respectful Church Environment: The Diocesan Policy for Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults*. http://www.saskatoonrcdiocese.com/privacy_and_policy/documents/Policy%20and%20Protocol%20Complete%20Doc.pdf All with pastoral responsibility within the Diocese are asked to reacquaint themselves with this document, to make its contents known, and to play their part in the continuing education and implementation which it calls for.

The burdens of the present moment are shared by all in the Church, and indeed by Christ. Our parishes abound with laywomen and laymen, religious and clergy, whose lives are characterized by great generosity, and a lively commitment to service, justice and reconciliation. All of us who daily struggle with the challenge of living as faithful disciples of Jesus carry the pain of our current situation. As a people grounded in the paschal mystery, we understand this to be sharing in the cross of Christ. I thank you all for your perseverance in faithfulness, and your continuing striving for holiness amid the complexities of life. In particular, I thank the priests and religious in the diocese who live under a particular burden at the present moment, for your faithful witness to the Gospel and your dedication to pastoral care for your brothers and sisters.

As an Easter people, we are able to address the darkness within us and not be overwhelmed by it, because *God is faithful*. This was the episcopal motto of other venerable predecessors: that of Bishop James Mahoney - *Fidelis Deus* - and that of Bishop James Weisgerber - *The Lord Keeps Faith Forever*. God's faithfulness has been proclaimed and experienced through the generations in this diocese, and we are the inheritors of that faith. We have been moulded and fashioned by the one who is *mercy within mercy within mercy*, and have come to know that it is only by this mercy that we live.

I would ask you, then, to join together in prayer. Let us pray for God's healing and mercy for all who have suffered violence or abuse, in the Church, in their family, or in society. We pray with and for Pope Benedict and all Church leaders and pastors as we work our way through this difficult period. Let us pray for those who did not deal properly with these situations, and deepened the suffering of those abused. And let us not be reluctant to pray also for those who have been guilty of abusing others; their sin does not make them exempt from our prayers or from God's mercy. Finally, let us pray for ourselves: may we ever more be stewards of that mercy, loving the good more than we hate the evil, being ever ready to give an account of the hope that is within us, with our words and with our lives.

Sincerely in Christ,



+ Donald Bolen
Bishop of Saskatoon