



ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES  
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Dear ACCU Member President,

As you may be aware, ACCU has released a [public statement](#) on the sex abuse crisis. This correspondence is intended to be a sharing from me to presidents of institutions of Catholic higher education.

Recent reports chronicling 70 years of systematic clerical sexual abuse in our Catholic Church have shaken me – like most of you – to my core. The people of God are reeling from the system-wide cancer of clerical cronyism. It is now clear that Church leadership did not live up to what we, as the body of Christ, profess: integrity, courage, and honesty.

The highest-ranking Church leaders took advantage of those in their care, both seminarians and parishioners, including children and adults. Our Church has yet to enact policies to discipline leaders who were complicit in allowing the perpetrators to continue in their ministry, which is almost as egregious as the actions of the perpetrators themselves.

It is time for all of us, especially those of us in Catholic higher education leadership, to be honest and forthright with ourselves. We must admit that perpetrators are morally deficient and those who have been abused are permanently scarred. This has happened during our life as Church members and educational leaders. It is time for each one of us to do more. This is the moment in the history of our Church that demands change.

In addition, it is time to revisit our institutional policies and procedures to make sure they safeguard the flocks that we shepherd. We must redouble our efforts to make sure our institutions are not only in compliance with the law, but also and more importantly, consistent with the Gospel. As influential leaders with access to local, regional, national, and curial leadership, I call upon each of you to join with me in courageously advocating for structural change in our Church. Recognizing full well that the structure did not cause this present crisis, we must, however, work to address how it contributed. The times and our faith demand both actions.

As we ask our new students to set goals for themselves at the beginning of a new academic year, I invite you to join with me in setting personal and institutional goals for the year regarding this issue. Words and prayers are no longer enough. I invite all leaders in Catholic higher education to advance the seven following actions:

1. Be bold. Meet with your local ecclesiastical authority and directly advocate for structures of accountability for bishops. Offer the assistance of your institution.
2. Ensure safety. Revisit your school's policies and enact the necessary changes that will lead to all being sexually and morally safe.
3. Include all. Advocate for lay people, especially women, to be included on sexual review boards at all levels of Church leadership. Find a specific Church authority you can approach to advance this recommendation.
4. Be clear. Ensure that all employees are clear as to what actions are to be taken if they witness an inappropriate sexual action. Strengthen campus policies in this regard.
5. Protect. Be sure that all new employees undergo recent background checks.
6. Take the lead. Revisit all programs in which youth are involved on campus. Make sure that your institutional procedures have appropriate safeguards for the youth in your care. In addition, confirm that these methodologies are being implemented.
7. Spread the word. Send the ACCU national office best practices that we can share with others.

No action we take will correct the past. In that regard, I grieve for the thousands of innocent souls – living and dead – who have had to endure unspeakable violence to the dignity of their person. I mourn for the Body of Christ, its shepherds, and flock. The sexual atrocities committed against our “little ones” are the single greatest assault in our Church's history. We must commit to a better future.

As leaders in Catholic higher education, we have much to offer the Church in reformation of its policies and practices for the protection of the innocent. Our reliance on Catholic Social and Intellectual Traditions can help

guide the way. As we are now faced with what seems like an insurmountable task, it is clear that no single person can solve this current crisis. We can only make a difference by advancing change together.

In closing, I offer you any resource at my disposal that can be of assistance. Let me begin the process by sharing what the ACCU staff has been able to collect to date. A number of resources are listed in the attached document. We hope that they will assist you on this topic. We are happy to post any additional resources that you send the national office on the presidents-only page of our website.

Now, more than ever, all of us are called to live lives of integrity, courage, and honesty. Thank you for your continued service in Catholic higher education, particularly at this very difficult juncture.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Galligan-Stierle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Galligan-Stierle, Ph.D.  
President  
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities