



Office of the Bishop

My brothers and sisters in Christ:

I am writing to the entire Catholic community of San Diego and Imperial Counties this week to speak about the unspeakable — the sexual abuse of minors by priests which was detailed in the report of the grand jury in Pennsylvania. The individual stories of abuse that robbed the souls and violated the bodies of so many innocent children and young people during the past seventy years are shattering. For me as a bishop there is an additional level of shame, because in many instances, this abuse was magnified by the leadership of the Church that placed fear of scandal and the culture of clericalism ahead of the protection of young people.

The Pennsylvania grand jury report demands action and also points the way toward reform in the life of our Church. That report reveals that the imposition of the zero tolerance policy in 2002 substantially worked. It ushered in a period in which sexual abuse of minors by priests fell dramatically through consistent reporting to civil authorities, the creation of lay boards to evaluate the truth of allegations, and the education of children about abuse.

The additional reforms that we must undertake at this moment must be based on the principles that produced positive change after 2002 — an unswerving focus on protecting minors and vulnerable adults and a binding voice for the laity in determining whether an allegation is true. Any genuine reform must forcefully integrate these principles in a framework of accountability that applies to bishops in their personal lives and administrative actions.

I have already begun a process of consultation with priestly and lay leadership in the diocese of San Diego focusing on the steps we need to take locally and nationally to accomplish genuine reform. During the month of October, I will hold eight town hall meetings throughout the diocese. These meetings will focus on seeking input from people in the pews on the pathway to such reform, listening to those who have been victimized by clerical sexual abuse either directly or in their families, and praying for God's grace to be our only guide. I invite you to be part of this effort by your presence or your prayers.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert W. McElroy  
Bishop of San Diego