

BISHOP'S OFFICE
PASTORAL CENTER
40 NORTH MAIN AVENUE, ALBANY, NEW YORK 12203
FAX (518) 453-6795 • TELEPHONE (518) 453-6611

August 17, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When I first heard the results of the Pennsylvania grand jury inquiry, I was as saddened and sickened by the news as you likely were. Speechless, really. That's why I decided to wait a few days before speaking to you. As I write this, I am on my annual retreat, where I am reflecting and praying daily for all of our faithful, but especially now for those everywhere whose lives have been so wounded at the hands of men they once trusted as their spiritual fathers.

I am praying for you as well, because I know that this news is making you angry, disgusted, confused, and perhaps unsure about how — or whether — to hang on in faith and support of the universal Church. What I want to say to you today is please don't lose hope. Not only because I want to affirm your deep faith in God as it is so critically challenged and your relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but because I need you, our Church needs you — and our Lord needs you.

What we are seeing is a terrible failure of leadership. Not all bishops and priests bear the same responsibility but, until we can do the painstaking work of identifying the culprits and correcting the systemic flaws that hid and shielded evildoers instead of innocents, a cloud of distrust and suspicion hangs over all in leadership, I am ashamed to say. Some may be afraid of the truth, but we needn't be. The truth is beautiful: it sheds light and dispels evil. We have nothing to fear from the truth. And we must demand nothing less. To behold our crucified Lord, remembering the graces that flow from his wounded side, has never seemed more vivid or relevant, as the sign of hope we look toward. Together we can get to the bottom of this and discover the goodness of God's grace, renewing our wounded Church, so beautiful in each and every one of you, praying and working together.

It is a time to prune the vine. Jesus is close to us. I have heard it said, in fact, that the vinedresser is never closer than when he is pruning the branches. Yes, we need to stay together, supporting and helping one another to bring about a spiritual renewal and a purifying change. We have made significant progress in recent years, but much lies ahead. As I said in a statement two weeks ago, lay people are essential to the solution our Church seeks, and I mean that. Those are not just words; that is my true and deep belief.

You are hurting right now, I know; I have heard from many of you. I am hurting as well, as are our priests, deacons and other leaders in parishes throughout our Diocese. As members of the Body of Christ what damages or destroys even one person affects us all. We can and we must let God enter into our pain and suffering, using it to energize and motivate us to work in the vineyard for the good of our family of faith not just in our own parishes and diocese but across

the country and around the world. Your voices, your vision, your experiences – and your prayers – are not only wanted by me and by your pastors, but are indispensable.

Saint Francis of Assisi once heard God call him to “rebuild my Church.” Now we are all called to do the same. Please join me in this challenge. We will stand together in the storm, face the Lord of all truth with courage and confidence, and follow his lead, as he steers us safely home.

Sincerely in Christ,

+Edward B. Scharfenberger

Edward B. Scharfenberger
Bishop of Albany