January 19, 2020

Dear St. Lawrence Parishioners:

Bishop Robert Barron wrote a short book last year called Letter to a Suffering Church. He was speaking as an individual bishop in light of the sickening clergy abuse scandals that have come to light over the past two decades.

His book comments on some of the horrific situations from past years that we have heard about in the news, grand jury reports, and investigations. These reports reveal the heart-breaking activities of bishops, priests, deacons, and lay leaders in the church. I’m sure you share my disgust from what you hear over-and-over again about the sins of the past (and present). And, you might even be tempted to lose faith because of it. But, this is the time where we renew our faith – and grow closer to Christ and His Church.

The conclusion of Bishop Barron’s book is that each of us should do something about the crisis. Silence is not the solution. The solution to the crisis belongs to each of us – even though none of us perpetuated it. And so, I purchased a copy of this book for each parish family (and extras to share). Feel free to take a copy or two (or three) and share with your friends as well. The goal is for every Catholic adult to read this book.

I find it fitting for us at St. Lawrence to consider this call to do something to heal the crisis. Here are some things I invite you to consider:

1. **Pray for the abused.** There are real people hurting because of abuse. People of all ages and all walks of life are aching because of the pain caused by another – sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. We must lift them up with our prayers, loving support, and tender compassion. It is our church family that can bring Christ’s love to others when we are truly loving. Show great love through prayer. And if you know someone who suffers from the effects of abuse, accompany them with Christ’s love.

2. **Pray for the abusers.** Abusers in our world are not just clergy and teachers (if you watch the news, you may think this). Adults throughout the world - people of all walks of life (family members and acquaintances, friends and siblings, men and women) - all types of people hurt others. And, often times, its because they were hurt in some way by another when they were younger. The work of the Devil perpetuates through the generations. We should counter-act this through prayer for those who need healing so that they don’t hurt others again.

3. **Get involved.** It is so easy to think that someone else will take care of it - and then, nobody does. Or, to sit back and critique (i.e. complain about) decisions others make. Get involved in the life of your parish and make it a better place. It takes everyone in a family to be a family – the same is true in a parish family.

*My God I honor and Him alone I serve.*
4. **Each of us must be informed.** Part of the reason the crisis impacted so many young people, is that people didn’t know what to look for and then have the courage to speak up. Being informed helps us recognize when others are in an unhealthy situation – so that we can help. We can be that voice for those who may be abused or neglected. But, we must know what to look for – and this requires that we be trained to recognize the signs.

This is precisely why I asked all volunteers over a year ago to complete the Safe & Sacred training. I’m grateful for the majority of volunteers who took the time to do it. Those who did are a great help for creating a safe environment for our young people.

I was shocked, however, by the few who refused. I was told by one parishioner that they would do it for any other organization, but not the church. Seriously? By another, I heard that the only problem was the priests. Ouch! And another person referred to it as being “vetted,” as if it was just about a background check to prove they were not an abuser. We lost a few volunteers because of it – because they refused to help build a safe environment.

This resistance to helping our young people be safe broke my heart. But, it revealed to me the problem that Bishop Barron was speaking about regarding the abuse crisis – people were not looking out for others – and people were unwilling to speak up. Even a two-hour online course was too much for some people to help keep children safe.

*The truth:* Since I have been pastor here, child-safety training has helped to identify five adults from this parish who cannot volunteer with children (for various reasons). I am thankful to some properly trained volunteers who helped recognize some of the warning signs – and then speak up. Our children are better off because of it!

*Aren you Safe & Sacred trained?*  

5. **Be aware of all that Bishop Doherty, Bishop Higi, and our Diocese have done over the years to keep our children safe.** Our diocese has been ahead-of-the-curve in so many ways. You can learn more by visiting: [https://www.dol-in.org/primer](https://www.dol-in.org/primer)

Please take some time to read Bishop Barron’s book! He has some important suggestions that we should all consider. It is worth your time to prayerfully read his book.

Please join me in praying for our Church, our community, and the world - that through our love, the sin and hurt of so many might be reconciled and healed.

God Bless,

Fr. Underwood

Very Rev. Eric Underwood, V.F.  
Pastor