

Letter to the People of God

Dear People of God of the Diocese of El Paso,

Please find below the letter I am sending to the priests and deacons of the Diocese of El Paso. This letter recommends actions that can be taken on the parish level to guide our local response to the scandals surrounding the sexual abuse of children by priests and bishops and the subsequent failure to respond appropriately by some bishops.

Certainly programs and protocols will be important and I refer to some of those here, but as always our most potent weapon against evil is prayer and the deeper conversion of our own hearts. That is the primary goal of many of these actions.

I will appreciate your support at the parish and diocesan level as individuals and through the various Church-based organizations to which you belong to assist us in implementing these actions and even challenging us to go beyond them in the service of God and His people.

Please pray for me and for all our priests and deacons, as well as all those called to leadership in the Church.

God Bless!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Mark J. Seitz, DD
Bishop of El Paso

September 14, 2018
Exultation of the Holy Cross

Dear brother priests and deacons,

It was very edifying to see the large number of priests and deacons that gathered for our Clergy Assembly on Thursday, the 13th! At this time in our life as a Church our mutual support and efforts to grow in our wonderful calling are more important than ever. During the meeting I announced to you several actions that I would like us as a Diocesan Church to take up as signs of our desire to care for victims of sexual abuse. Beginning with prayer and penance we can also move forward our efforts to become more transparent signs of the presence of the Lord in our midst. These efforts will complement our work locally and as a National Conference to improve our assistance for victims, to create a safer environment for all our members and to provide better protocols for the reporting of abuse by any member of the clergy, including bishops.

I thought it would be helpful for those who were not able to be present and as a reference for those who were there to offer these actions that I am asking the entire Church of El Paso to undertake:

1. Fasting on Fridays for the healing of victims of abuse (exception could be made for feasts that fall on Friday, Christmas and Easter)
2. A Rosary should be said in every parish at least once a week for victims of abuse. Priests and deacons should lead or participate unless otherwise prevented by their schedule.
3. A petition for the victims of sexual abuse in the Church should be included in every Sunday Liturgy.
4. Recommitment in each parish to the full implementation of VIRTUS Safe Environment Program in every church community.
5. Parish communities are encouraged to plan any other prayer actions along these lines such as holy hours, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, Novenas or the like.
6. Every priest and deacon should see this as a call to strengthen his own personal prayer life so that he can be a more transparent sign of God's presence.

As I mentioned we are working at the Diocesan level to eventually publish a list of all priests that have been accused of sexual abuse and for whom a preponderance of evidence confirms that accusation. We want to give people in our diocese the assurance of knowing that we are not hiding anyone who has committed these criminal actions and that we intend to give an opportunity for victims of abuse to come forward so that they might experience healing.

Once again I ask you to cultivate the greatest sense of compassion for those who have suffered these reprehensible violations of human dignity, for their families and communities. We do well to remember the call issued to us by Pope Benedict XVI in his address to U.S. Bishops during his 2008 pastoral visit: *"It is your God-given responsibility as pastors to bind up the wounds caused by every breach of trust, to foster healing, to promote reconciliation and to reach out with loving concern to those so seriously wronged."*

I remain so grateful to all of you, brothers in the Lord, for the holy work you do day to day as committed servants of Christ. Your presence and your mutual support mean a great deal to me as we navigate together these challenging days in the life of the Church. I am confident that as he always does, God will use this experience for the strengthening of the Church and for our growth in holiness.

May God bless you!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Mark J. Seitz, DD