

Dear Cardinal Cupich,

These are very tough and testing times for our faith and our Catholic family. We know that you and your brother bishops have been brought low by the failures of the institutional church to address the ongoing abuse crisis and the dreadful decisions to cover up abuse and abusers. We too, as faithful Catholics, are hurting in every parish across the country. Even as we recognize the pain and disappointment so many of us feel, it pales in comparison with how abuse survivors have been maligned and mistreated, ignored and silenced. For some of us, the extent of the crisis goes so deep and so personal that it is hard to face what has been done and what the hierarchy has failed to do. But face it we must and act we must if justice is to be done and the truth is to be heard. It is only then that we can begin to think about healing.

Our groups have not always agreed with the bishops on many issues. That good faith disagreement can cause a lot of frustration; we have felt our leaders have failed to listen to the *sensus fidelium* and pursue social justice for those within the church. But we write today not to surface those issues, but instead as ordinary Catholics to reach out to you in good faith and to offer our support and advice. As chief envoy to Pope Francis' February Conference in Rome on abuse prevention, we urge you to listen. We urge you to show the leadership we have not seen, grounded in a humility and forthrightness that once and for all could move your colleagues in Rome to truly address globally what is broken, restore the trust of Catholics and give comfort and justice to those who have survived abuse.

As We Are Church International has said, we need real action by the world's bishops—action that comes from admitting what was wrong and taking firm steps to put it right once and for all.

We urge you to begin by doing the following:

- Immediately report to civil authorities any credible accusation of abuse by priests or cover-up by the hierarchy.
- Remove and prosecute all bishops who knowingly reassigned sexually abusive priests from their leadership positions and take steps to ensure that those who are appointed have not engaged in criminal activity.
- Categorically reject any proposal that places a metropolitan bishop in charge of oversight of any clergy sex abuse cases. As you said, the bishops must “cede all authority” to people outside of the hierarchical system. Instead, create panels of lay experts to review and respond to all complaints of sexual abuse.
- Open all files regarding sexual abuse at the Vatican, national bishops' conference, and diocesan levels to review by experts.
- The trickle-down of the abuse and cover up as you know has had negative effect on so many in the community. One of the intolerable effects is the scapegoating of gay men in the priesthood—it is so important that church leadership make clear that there is no causal connection between sexual abuse and homosexuality.
- Immediately cease efforts to block the lengthening of statutes of limitations on sexual abuse of minors.
- Provide payment for counseling and financial compensation to anyone bringing forth any allegation(s) of sexual abuse by church staff that is deemed credible by an independent panel of expert reviewers.
- Develop a process of public reconciliation where victims and survivors of abuse can speak clearly and directly to church leaders.
- Make individual apologies to every victim and affected family.

We are sure you fear that many seeing the abuse and the cover ups and the denial will lose faith in our religion and turn away from being Catholic. We know it is not our religion that is to blame, but rather the people who committed these crimes and the leadership who covered it up. Humans fail sometimes at a great cost to others. Although we can agree that progress has been made since the Dallas Charter, we still have a way to go. There are so many things that could and should be done to truly address these concerns.

Today we would like you to think about tackling the deep-seated culture of clericalism and how it deeply hurts all of us. We need to end that wall of silence that has allowed clergy to commit such atrocities against children and adults with impunity. We need you to stand against a clericalism that is corrupt. We need you to trust and honor the voice and assistance that lay Catholics can offer in the life and decisions of the church.

Our mothers used to remind us that no one learns anything new while talking. A listening church maybe could learn something new and begin again.

After your Rome visit, we would welcome an opportunity to listen to you and hear what you have learned. In turn, we would like you to meet and hear us in the honest effort to help you and our church move to a better place on this most critical and painful issue.

You are in our prayers,

Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church (ARCC)

Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests

Call to Action

Catholics for Choice

CORPUS

DignityUSA

FutureChurch

New Ways Ministry

National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN)

Quixote Center

RAPPORT

Roman Catholic Womenpriests

Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)

Women's Ordination Conference