



DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

6 August 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Prayer, Fasting & Penance for the Spiritual Conversion of the Church

Given the news in the past few weeks regarding Church leadership and sexual abuse, I have had many discussions with people who have expressed outrage, frustration, questions, confusion, and lack of trust in Church leadership. As one person said, the news has brought “a deep sense of darkness that calls out for the grace and light of Christ.”

More than anything, these tragic events are a call to spiritual conversion.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus reminds us that the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven is one like a child (Matt. 18). He further warns not to despise one of these little ones. These statements by Christ point to the complete abandonment and trust a child inherently places in his or her parents and others in authority. Thus, when any abuse happens by one in authority, that trust is completely shattered. A wound is created in a child that will never disappear. It sadly never goes away and one does not just “get over it.”

Christ’s words on the treatment of children are harsh to those who mislead or harm them. As a priest of 22 years and a bishop of almost four, I have unfortunately heard far too many stories of people abused as children, youth, or adults. Tragically, some of this has been committed by Church staff. The Diocese of Fairbanks has a painful history of sexual and ethnic/cultural abuse over the years by Church personnel. This is a grave violation of the living, sacred image and likeness of God that is woven in the total being of every person. In light of recent events, as well as the sad history within our diocese, we must respond to God’s call to holiness, which is the only response that will enable us to become ambassadors of healing and hope.

Providentially, the diocese has already laid the foundation for this. On February 14, 2018, the Catholic Bishops of Alaska issued a pastoral letter, *Living in the Image and Likeness of God: Human Dignity and Divine Designs*. In it, we stated, “Since all human life is created by God and bears His image and likeness, all life is sacred. This divine origin of human life is the source of human dignity.” This gift of life has been entrusted to humanity and we have a most holy responsibility to safeguard and nurture the sacredness and dignity of every human person.

In addition, the diocese has implemented background checks and “Safe Environment” training in the past three years for all volunteers, catechists, and clergy through its Office of Child Protection and Safe Environment. This office sends quarterly communications and it is imperative that all parishes read and implement these procedures. These processes are in place to protect the people in our parishes and your compliance is necessary for it to be effective.

The priests and religious throughout the three regions of our diocese gather quarterly for meetings, prayer, and reflection. The next Spiritual Formation Days for those on the Fairbanks Road System and Middle Yukon Region will be August 21-23. **As the shepherd of our diocese, I invite you to join our priests and religious in a day of prayer, fasting, and penance for the spiritual conversion of the Church on Tuesday, August 21.** In Fairbanks, we will have the opportunity to spend the day before Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, asking him to draw us closer to him and heal the wounds inflicted on his Church by those in positions of authority.

Our schedule will be as follows:

8:00am—Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
9:00am—Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary
11:00am—Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary
12:10pm—Daily Mass
2pm—Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary
3pm—Divine Mercy Chaplet
4pm—Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary
5pm—Benediction

This will take place at Sacred Heart Cathedral. In addition to these events, a priest will be available for conversation, prayer, or the Sacrament of Reconciliation throughout the day. For those unable to join us in Fairbanks, I invite you to spend time before the Blessed Sacrament in your local parish and to join us spiritually through prayer and fasting.

In the Gospel reading on August 5, we heard in John 6:24, “When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus.” Like the crowd, the entire Church, especially Church leaders, need to draw closer to Christ. As the crowd drew closer to Christ, he saw their hunger for truth and healing and gave them his very self, the Bread of Life. In this time of crisis, may we draw closer to Christ, asking for his grace and light to bring conversion and healing to his entire Mystical Body.

Sincerely,

†Most Reverend Chad W. Zielinski
Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska
Diocese of Fairbanks