



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

August 11, 2019
19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Our Church continues to suffer as a result of past sins of sexual abuse of minors. Victim survivors of abuse and their families also continue to carry the terrible effects of that abuse. We pray that the fire of the Holy Spirit may descend upon the Church to purify and sanctify her. It is also important that we are all aware of recent developments that will cause uncertainty and present serious challenges for us in the months and perhaps years ahead.

Governor Andrew Cuomo signed the Child Victims Act (CVA) into law last February. The CVA suspends for one year any statute of limitations associated with alleged sexual abuse of a minor. This law will allow currently time-barred lawsuits to be brought against individuals as well as public and private institutions, regardless of how many years or even decades ago the abuse may have taken place.

When the one-year window to file lawsuits opens on August 14, 2019, hundreds, if not thousands of lawsuits are expected to be filed across New York State against dioceses, parishes, municipalities, public schools, hospitals and a broad range of not-for-profit charitable organizations, both religious and non-religious. The financial impact of this law may be far reaching.

However, if we are people of the Paschal Mystery, we enter the unknown with what we do know – that the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ will sustain and strengthen us in the days ahead. The power of the Resurrection overcomes despair.

No doubt, we will hear about many past failures. We will again hear the heart wrenching stories of victim survivors. I have personally met with survivors of abuse, their families, friends and loved ones. I have listened at a deep level to their stories of tragedy, betrayal, trauma and their heroic efforts to engage in the process of healing. Their lifelong wounds of trauma run so deep, that only the warmth of the Holy Spirit can begin to touch, relieve and heal them. Together, we pray that the fire of the Holy Spirit brings the light of true repentance and reform, moving the Church to continue listening and responding with the humility and compassion of Jesus Christ.

It is also important that we be aware of what is already happening and has been happening for many years in our Diocese as to the extraordinary work that goes into child protection. First, the Diocesan Office for the Protection of Children and Young People was established in 2003. Many years of hard work have made this office one which puts the safety and well-being of children first, and seeks to reach out to and support victim survivors of abuse. It works to ensure the screening and training of every person who works in or volunteers for the Church. If you are an employee or a volunteer in your parish, you know about background checks, VIRTUS training and the call for every member of the Church to be vigilant in protecting children.

For years, we have worked closely with law enforcement whenever an allegation of abuse is made against a member of the clergy, an employee or volunteer in the Diocese of Rockville Centre. Our confidential hotline (516-594-9063) is closely monitored, and calls made to it are returned within 24 hours by a licensed mental health professional. Allegations of abuse are promptly reported to the appropriate district attorney's office and are thoroughly investigated. In addition, pastoral care and mental health support is offered to any abuse survivor who needs assistance.

These are just a few of the reforms, efforts and safeguards that have been in place since 2002 in our Diocese, and have made the Church on Long Island a truly safe environment. And we do not rest there. We continually work to discern the best ways to adjust and enhance our child protection practices, to raise consciousness in the Church and society about vigilance and to support survivors of abuse.

In 2017, we initiated our Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program (IRCP) to provide a confidential mechanism for survivors to receive compensation and some measure of healing and justice. We intend to continue this program for the foreseeable future, even after the CVA takes effect, so survivors can, if they wish, be heard in a fair, respectful, confidential and timely way. To date, 370 people have filed claims with our IRCP. The vast majority of claimants – 277 to be exact – have accepted compensation totaling just over \$50 million, with 75-80 claims still being processed.

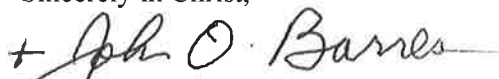
We have worked diligently with our financial and legal advisors to assess our financial position and maximize the availability of insurance coverage to meet the demands that will likely be imposed by anticipated CVA litigation. Please also know that parish collections and financial donations made through the Catholic Ministries Appeal will continue to be used, consistent with our commitment to our parishioners, to support the Diocese, and its ministries and pursue the goals of the Catholic Ministry Appeal. The parish offertory and Catholic Ministry Appeal funds have not and will not be used to resolve claims for clergy sexual abuse.

The work of the Church – of administering the Sacraments, of teaching, healing, advocating, serving, and ministering to the poor and vulnerable – can and must continue, despite the sins of the past. I speak in greater detail about all of this, and about the Diocese's robust safe environment practices and commitment to them, in a Catholic Faith Network (CFN) special video which you can view on CFN television, the Diocesan website (www.drvc.org) and on Diocese of Rockville Centre social media platforms.

The coming months will require perseverance and prayer if we are to emerge even more dedicated to Christ's saving mission. As the opening of the CVA window takes place near the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, we are reminded to turn to Mary our Mother and draw courage from the one who did not look away from her suffering Son. She waited patiently, suffered with Him, and shared in His victory over sin and death.

This is the same Mary who, as Mother of the Church, gathered with the Apostles in the locked room, waiting for the power of the Holy Spirit to descend at Pentecost. As we enter a time of Paschal Mystery suffering, may Mary guide us, so that together we may continue to carry out the mission of her Son: the building up of the Kingdom of God throughout Long Island and the world.

Sincerely in Christ,


Most Reverend John O. Barres
Bishop of Rockville Centre