



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF MEMPHIS

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Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Over the past few months, we have been reminded once again of the sad and painful legacy of sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy and others associated with the Catholic Church. We have been distressed and angered as we heard the stories of victim survivors, and as we came to realize the indifference and lack of compassion with which many of these children and adults were greeted in the past. We have come face-to-face with the fact that many of those who were ordained to serve breached that sacred trust either in their actions or in their failure to stop the actions of others. The pain of these victim survivors weighs upon us all, and I have felt that weight most acutely over these past few months.

The wounds of abuse, even if decades old, reveal the terrible damage and pain for victims harmed by the sin and crime of sexual abuse. Our hearts go out to the victims and their loved ones. In the midst of great suffering and discouragement, we seek the light and grace of Jesus Christ, grounded in the truth of the Gospel.

Although I have only served as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Memphis for the past month, I recognize that this national and international scandal has also touched the lives of many in West Tennessee. It is a past that must be acknowledged if the wounds of that past are to heal. In the time that I am your Apostolic Administrator, I am committed to working toward that healing – and to assisting the next bishop of Memphis in continuing that vital task.

The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, adopted by the bishop's conference in 2002, calls for the establishment of a diocesan review board to examine and advise the bishop on matters of clergy sexual abuse of minors. The Review Board of the Diocese of Memphis was established by Bishop Steib and has functioned in a professional and compassionate manner. We are grateful to those who have served on the Review Board over the years, many of whom continue to serve. To evidence our commitment to a fair and deliberate process, I have re-authorized the Review Board and appointed some new members. I will encourage the Review Board to conduct any investigations and hold any hearings that they deem appropriate.

Also, since the establishment of the Charter, all of the employees of the Diocese of Memphis, as well as of each parish, school and related entity have participated in an educational program designed to help identify and stop instances of child sexual abuse. In addition, all have undergone criminal background checks. As in previous years, our compliance with the Charter was recently verified by an audit conducted by Stonebridge Business Partners. This firm made several recommendations to improve our response to the issue of sexual abuse and the diocese is determining how we might implement these recommendations.

It has been diocesan policy and practice to report any allegation of sexual abuse against a minor to local law enforcement officials, in accordance with the laws of the State of Tennessee. I have reminded all of the employees of the diocese to comply with the law and to adhere to this policy.

The Victim Assistance Coordinator for the diocese is available to speak with any victim of sexual abuse perpetrated by any member of the clergy or any employee or volunteer of the diocese. While the

Coordinator will comply with applicable law and make a report to law enforcement if one has not already been made, these conversations will be otherwise confidential. We want to assure any victim who makes a report that they will be treated with the utmost respect and compassion. If you or your child has been the victim of sexual abuse by a bishop, priest, deacon or diocesan employee or agent, we encourage you to report such abuse:

- Tennessee Child Abuse Hotline at 1-877-237-0004
- Victim Assistance Coordinator at 901-652-4066
- Director of Child and Youth Protection at 901-359-2027

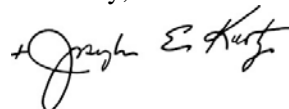
The Diocese of Memphis offers a program of psychological and spiritual assistance to abused victims in need.

Because of my very recent arrival as Apostolic Administrator of this diocese, I will need some time to examine the steps that have been taken here in the past to respond to these serious violations and to determine what additional steps may need to be taken or what disclosures may need to be made. I want to ensure that our actions promote the healing of victim survivors and deal decisively with those who have abused others. I promise you that addressing the issue of sexual abuse in our Church will be a top priority for me here in the Diocese of Memphis as it is for me in the Archdiocese of Louisville.

As you may have heard, our Holy Father Pope Francis has called the presidents of all of the national bishops' conferences to Rome in February to address this issue on a global scale. We are grateful that the universal Church is formally addressing the sin and crime of sexual abuse in such a decisive way, and we look forward to improving our response by implementing the decrees of the Holy Father after this extraordinary gathering of the worldwide Church.

I make a personal pledge to you, the faithful, to act decisively on behalf of survivors of sexual abuse and to ensure that any future abuse is confronted swiftly and justly. I am encouraged by those of you who continue to love and serve the Lord with all your heart. You help me to grow in my own relationship with Christ. Please pray for me, and I will continue to pray for you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph E. Kurtz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D.
Apostolic Administrator