

# CATHOLIC HERALD

## Archbishop: During Crisis, 'Lead, Not Leave'

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*Archbishop ListECKI recently sat down with the Catholic Herald for a Q&A session regarding issues arising from the Church's current sexual abuse scandal.*

**Q.** Where does the Archdiocese stand in regards to the current climate in the church?

As far as the larger climate, Pennsylvania and Archbishop McCarrick, I think the public in general, all across the nation, feels a betrayal of trust. They feel anger. They feel hurt. In some context, they thought the issue had been addressed and taken care of, and here, all of a sudden, the wound has been opened up again. In the larger context, there is definitely a lack of trust in the leadership of the Church.

**Q.** Since 2002, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee has made a concerted effort toward training, awareness and transparency. How do you feel those efforts have worked?

That was a good movement, not only for us, but for the whole of society. We in the Church can't rest on what we've done in the past. We've got to continue to be vigilant to make sure these procedures that have been put in place, respond to and help to create an environment where individuals always feel their children are safe within the confines of the Church.

**Q.** Do you believe the Pennsylvania AG's report is the tip of the iceberg of another series of revelations like the early 2000s, or do you think it's isolated?

No. I think what has happened is because of the awareness and the transparency of the Pennsylvania report, it was a tremendous shock to the system to see the numbers

of those who had been abused within the context of the Church. When you go back 70 years, it's a compilation of a tremendous amount of actions. I don't think that Pennsylvania will be the end point. When you see numbers like that, it's a shock.

**Q.** Archbishop McCarrick was a shock because he was so high-ranking in the Church. Do you think his situation is unique or do you think there are other dominoes to fall?

I was shocked and felt betrayed as I would imagine most other bishops, priests and faithful in the Church felt. That someone of this level had credible allegations against him. The sense is we have to take a look at each individual case, evaluate it properly and proceed according to the norms we established for the good of the Church. Part of the aspect of betrayal is that it seems like McCarrick was above this and that should have never happened.

**Q.** Do you think it's important victims come forward immediately or do you still have to be sensitive and let them come forward in their own timing?

Each person is different. We will receive them whenever there's an appropriate time for them.

**Q.** What role does the laity have in investigating and helping clean up the Church? One of the things that has come out of this is there have been some calls for more laity involvement in investigating as this moves forward.

I've never seen the Church as separate. I've always viewed ourselves as one, like a large family. Certainly, I think professionalism among many of our lay people can help us to make sure that we are vigilant, to make sure we are making a proper evaluation,

to help us understand whether we are responding in a manner that's appropriate. So, when you say, can lay people help, yes. Not only have they helped in the past but I believe they will continue to do so, because they, like I, love the Church. We are concerned to make sure the Church, which was given to us as a gift, is in the minds of most people, a safe place for them to be. We don't want anyone to think the Church harbors or fosters anyone who might be a perpetrator.

**Q.** What are some things people can do to assist or encourage the "good" priests?

I think, for the most part, lay people do that. They have deep relationships with our priests. I know I've been privileged to be in a number of parishes and I have lifelong relationships with people and families I respect and see almost as brothers and sisters. I think the natural aspect of many families within the Church is to love their priest. I know many good priests who will quickly acknowledge that's basically what lay people do for them, and how they're empowered by that and it gives them strength. Those priests that I know treat their parishes like families.

**Q.** While their "crimes" aren't as bad as the ones who have committed sexual abuse, where do you place priests, bishops, cardinals who knew about accusations and didn't say anything, or that helped move priests around?

You have to take a look at the context and you have to take a look at the time. What we knew about this issue changed from the 50s, 60s and 70s to the 80s and 90s. But you have to take a look at whether the bishop did respond, and how he responded. Then I have to think you have to assess it, whether



there was a cover-up. If so, those bishops should be held accountable.

**Q. What about bishops who moved around known predators? Are the culpable?**

A lot depends on what they knew at the time. What actions were taken? If, indeed, there was a cover-up, then I would say they should be held accountable.

**Q. What do you make of Archbishop Vigano's accusations against the Pope?**

I think they're serious claims. I think they have to be investigated. I stand with Cardinal DiNardo (the President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops) and others who have said they have to be thoroughly investigated to bring some sort of satisfaction to the Church and the Church's community.

**Q. What would you say to the faithful who are angry, sad, disillusioned with the Church at this point?**

The first thing I would say is I understand them because I am all the things you said, angry, disillusioned, sad and frustrated. I understand the nature of their feeling. I have always treated my relationship with the Church as family, and it's unimaginable for me to think that a child would be placed in the care of a priest and to have that trust violated. It's unimaginable. It causes me a tremendous amount of anger in response to that action. What I can do is take that anger and allow it to be fed by my sense of my faith, and assure people that as a family, we're going to address this in a way that brings dignity to all of us. One word you have brought up a lot is trust.

**Q. How important is it for leaders in the Church to remind themselves that trust should not be something you take for granted?**

I think it's imperative. How can you look to, whether it's a pastor in a parish or a bishop in a diocese, to lead you toward holiness if you don't trust that his words are reflecting his own belief and action. I know that trust has been damaged. I know also the only way trust is, or distrust, is brought into repair is by looking at the

actions that are taken, not only in the words of the statement, but taking a look at what is accomplished for the community.

**Q. Do you think there has been a clerical culture in the Church that has contributed to the poor handling of this issue? Is this about protecting the family at the expense of the children?**

I think there were those that were misguided in thinking they could protect the institution from aspects of scandal, so the supposed cover-ups were done, and I am stretching here, in a meaningful way to protect the Church and the larger laity from scandal. But, sin is sin, and unless it's ripped out at its root, it's like a cancer and it grows. One cover-up becomes a second, becomes a third. Therefore, those that did that, they did it in terms of their mindset for quote "the good of the institution," when they were actually destroying the very foundation of the Church itself.

**Q. The U.S. Conference of Bishops just met with the Pope. If you were in the room with the Pope, what would you say to him?**

One of the things I would say immediately is "Your Holiness, this is a tremendously serious question, and it can't be put on just a level with other problems." This is a serious question where the leadership of the Church, the shepherds are questioned whether they're leading people to lives of holiness or away from the very Gospel that Jesus presents to us. My sense of the Pope is you, as the shepherd for all of us, most lead us back to holiness by transparency that can only come from leadership.

**Q. What do you say to the people of your diocese that are entrusted to your care?**

I share your anger, frustration, your hurts. I share in that, but I say to them that it is a new day here in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee because of the great disclosure by many of those who have been violated in the past, and because of that, we're a different Church than we were 20 years ago. Being a different Church, we have to maintain the vigilance of that Church, always protecting and looking at the

object, which is to make sure our children are safe. I would call on the lay faithful of the diocese to help me in doing that. I pledge them I'll do everything I can to make sure that goal is achieved.

**Q. We've heard that before. Why should we believe you? Why should we trust you?**

One of the things is the fact we have made changes. It would be disingenuous for me to say we've talked about change, we're going to change, but we didn't. We have made changes. Those changes have been in place due to the experience of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, and responding to those bad actors, bad priests who have taken it upon themselves to sin. We are different and we have instituted (changes), but there's never enough that can be done. We must continue to do more. If we find different avenues to do that, we will do it, and that's my pledge.

**Q. What would you say to people who've said enough is enough, we've heard you, we've stuck with the Church, but I can't anymore, I'm leaving, it's too much again?**

What would come from me — a Church leader and a believer — is the fact that I believe this Church was instituted by Christ. I believe this Church has been given the truth, which is the Holy Spirit, to lead people to salvation and lives of holiness. I am a believer, and I believe this, and I would hope those who are Catholics would also believe that, and understand that despite some of the bad actors that have been in the Church and the bad actions that have taken place within the context of our Church, this Church is still a Church that is grace giving. This Church is the Church that reconciles. This still is the Church that gives us the Body of Christ, and so therefore, because of that, I would say when you stand at a point where your frustration and anger could cause you to leave. I would say the challenge for you is to take that anger and frustration, and stay. To lead within the Church, and to lead those who are seeking confidence and trust, and to help me lead the Church in that direction.