

## Comments from Archbishop Jerome Listecky of Milwaukee at the end of the Chrism Mass 2010

This past week our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has come under criticism for the way he has handled past cases of clergy sexual abuse of minors, including a case here involving Lawrence Murphy. The allegations against him, as well as the facts supporting him, are widely available. The Holy Father does not need me to defend him or his decisions. I believe, and history will confirm, that his actions in responding to this crisis swiftly and decisively, and his compassionate response to victims/survivors, speak for themselves. The Holy Father has been firm in his commitment to combat clergy sexual abuse; root it out of the Church; reach out to those who have been harmed; and hold perpetrators accountable. He has been a leader, meeting with victims/survivors and chastising bishops for their lack of judgment and leadership.

Mistakes were made in the Lawrence Murphy case. The mistakes were not made in Rome in 1996, 1997 and 1998. The mistakes were made here, in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, in the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s, by the Church, by civil authorities, by Church officials, and by bishops. And for that, I beg your forgiveness in the name of the Church and in the name of this Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Because of those who have come forward – those who have been harmed in a most egregious way; those who have been relentless in their criticism of the Church; those who have pushed and prodded – some say even forced – the Church to change; those brave victims/survivors who have had the courage to come forward and publicly tell their story even after decades of feeling ignored – because of their persistence and perseverance, we know the Church HAS changed. We owe these victims/survivors our deep gratitude and we acknowledge our own actions have not always expressed that gratitude adequately. We know that today the policies and procedures in place in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and across the United States ensure, to the best of our God-given ability, that no priest with a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor can ever serve as a priest again in our Church. Still, we know it is not words, but actions that will demonstrate our resolve. And, in some ways, regardless of what I say, tonight or any other time, our critics will say it is not enough. But that cannot and will not prevent me from making every possible effort at moving forward toward healing and resolution with those who have been harmed, and determined to make sure nothing like this can ever happen again.

To you gathered here tonight – our pastors, priests, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers – through your vigilance at our parishes and schools, we now have in place the mechanisms to effectively combat the scourge of child sexual abuse. Through the formation and training of our safe environment initiative, we know that you, in your parishes, schools and institutions, have put in place the necessary safeguards and practices to ensure our children are protected. Thank you. Remain vigilant.

Even though some do not want to hear it or accept it as truth, mistakes were made by law enforcement, medical professionals – even reporters who helped bring initial stories to light and grappled with how to deal with perpetrators. We have ALL learned so much. We cannot deny the past, but because of all of it, during these past years we have become a more prudent Church. We have taken significant steps to purge this abuse from our Church and even from the larger society. We hope and pray our actions have become a model for what TO do after decades of what NOT to do. + Jerome Listecky