

Archbishop Lori says allegations open old wounds for abuse victims

Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore acknowledged the renewed pain and anger caused by clergy sexual abuse following the release of a Pennsylvania grand jury report that details some of the actions taken by Cardinal William H. Keeler when he was a bishop in Pennsylvania.

“At this difficult time in the life of the church, we in the Archdiocese of Baltimore are especially saddened and troubled by the news of the late Cardinal William H. Keeler’s failures while serving as Bishop of Harrisburg, one of six dioceses cited in the grand jury report,” Archbishop Lori said in a **statement** Aug. 14.

Cardinal Keeler was auxiliary bishop of Harrisburg from 1979 to 1983, when he became bishop of the diocese until his appointment to Baltimore in 1989.

“The cardinal’s 2002 letter to the faithful of Baltimore which accompanied his disclosure of credibly accused priests included words that are even more revealing in light of today’s report: ‘The simple, painful truth is that the Church did not go far enough to protect children from sexual abuse,’ the cardinal wrote. ‘I humbly ask forgiveness for my mistakes. Please pray for me so that I may better serve,’” Archbishop Lori said.

✖ The 2002 report from Cardinal Keeler made Baltimore one of the first dioceses in the country to release a comprehensive list of names of priests who had been accused of sexual misconduct with minors. The report came just a few months after the U.S. bishops, gathered in Dallas, approved the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and accompanying norms that required dioceses to implement “zero-tolerance” policies regarding clergy sexual misconduct.

The archbishop noted that in light of the “painful revelations about the cardinal’s failures to protect children while serving as Bishop of Harrisburg, it is no longer the plan of the archdiocese to name the proposed new Catholic school in Baltimore after Cardinal Keeler.”

"The findings of the grand jury, which follow recent revelations about alleged abusive behavior by Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, are rightly a cause for anger, disillusion and pain among many in our church," Archbishop Lori said. "These feelings toward the church must be met with more than prayers and promises. They must also be met with action by any and all with responsibility for ensuring the safety of children and others in our care.

"It is clear that any such efforts must include lay involvement, for no longer can we expect the faithful to entrust this to the hierarchy, alone," he said. "Try as we have, recent revelations have not only proven that there is more work to be done, but also have resulted in the loss of the precious trust of many of those we are called to serve."

He added: "In this dark hour in the life of the church, those of us who have been called to lead, humbly ask forgiveness and prayers for those who failed in their duties as ministers of the Gospel by placing clerical and institutional good above the welfare of those they were called to serve, these they were duty-bound to protect.

"My prayers today are with the survivors and their families, with the faithful of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and with the many good and holy priests, deacons and religious who selflessly serve in the example of Jesus Christ each and every day in this local Church," the archbishop said.

A joint statement Aug. 14 in response to the grand jury report - from Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Houston, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Bishop Timothy L. Doherty of Lafayette in Indiana, chairman for the bishops' Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People - said, "We are profoundly saddened each time we hear about the harm caused as a result of abuse, at the hands of a clergyman of any rank."

The statement also said, "The report of the Pennsylvania grand jury again illustrates the pain of those who have been victims of the crime of sexual abuse by individual members of our clergy, and by those who shielded abusers and so facilitated an evil that continued for years or even decades.

"We are grateful for the courage of the people who aided the investigation by sharing

their personal stories of abuse. As a body of bishops, we are shamed by and sorry for the sins and omissions by Catholic priests and Catholic bishops,” the prelates said.

In an interview after Archbishop McCarrick resigned from the college of cardinals but before the attorney general of Pennsylvania released its nearly 900-page grand jury report about 70 years of sexual abuse in that state, Archbishop Lori said that when new allegations of abuse by clergy or others representing the church surface, he is certain it opens old wounds.

When the abuser is a high-profile member of the church, such as Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, the former archbishop of Washington whose resignation from the College of Cardinals was accepted July 28 by Pope Francis, “I think it wounds even more deeply. It shocks people more deeply. It shakes (victim-survivors) more deeply,” Archbishop Lori said.

Archbishop Lori added that he experienced anger, anguish and grief over the situation involving Archbishop McCarrick. “I can only imagine what this means for someone who is suffering the results of sexual abuse in their lives on a long-term basis.”

This also affects people in the pews who have not been affected directly by abuse, because all Catholics are dedicated to spreading the Gospel, but those evangelization efforts “hinge on the credibility of the church and her ministers,” Archbishop Lori said. When someone as high profile as Archbishop McCarrick is accused of misconduct, it undercuts the church’s credibility in dealing with sexual misconduct.

“Trust is a very, very important thing in all areas of life but it is particularly important in the life of faith. ... Our efforts to rebuild trust and credibility have been dealt a setback,” Archbishop Lori said.

“This is not the first time in the history of the church that this has happened, not the first time in the history of the church that powerful, high-profile church leaders have behaved in a truly scandalous way,” he said. “The church, in God’s grace, has always found a way to go forward. I’m confident we will again. But, this is certainly a severe

setback. And I deeply, deeply regret it.”

He quoted St. Paul who said that the church did not belong to Paul or to Cephas or other individuals, but that the church is Christ Jesus. “All of us who are ministers of the Gospel, all of us who are followers of Christ are people who are flawed – and sometimes deeply flawed,” Archbishop Lori said. “The Lord loves us. The Lord tries to draw us to himself.

“I think that our faith is not in a particular priest or bishop or other minister of the church, no matter how beloved that person might be.” On the other hand, those who represent the church have an obligation to be genuinely on the road to holiness, struggle with their own weaknesses and God’s grace, and be credible by striving to live what we proclaim as Catholics, he said.

The archbishop said when the sexual abuse crisis in the church came to national attention in 2002 and the bishops passed the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People” at a meeting in Dallas, the bishops set as a cornerstone that sexual abuse of a children is not to be tolerated in the life of the church.

In the words of the 2002 charter: “For us, your bishops, our obligation to protect children and young people and to prevent sexual abuse flows from the mission and example given to us by Jesus Christ himself, in whose name we serve.”

“One strike and you’re out,” Archbishop Lori said of the zero-tolerance policies passed by the bishops in Dallas.

Significant progress has been made in the church since that time, with the establishment of independent review boards, and background checks and training for all clergy, seminarians, employees and volunteers who work with minors.

After the grand jury report, the archbishop said he has made the healing of survivors and the strengthening of the archdiocese’s existing child protection efforts a top priority.

“Key to our efforts is the strength of our independent review board and our mediation program for survivors of abuse,” he said Aug. 14. “Both of these rely heavily on the independent leadership of laity, which will be integral to the

credibility of any effort to advance reforms in the Church to bring about greater trust, accountability, and transparency. These are all critical to our ongoing and daily efforts to protect those in our care and to promote healing among those the Church failed to protect.”

In the earlier interview, the archbishop said that when he came to Baltimore six years ago, he was impressed at how seriously the archdiocese had taken implementation of the charter, with “strong policies, implemented with consistency; a great independent review board; a willingness to be open and transparent; as well as a willingness to keep checking ourselves, asking ourselves what have we missed; and a willingness to try to our best ability to reach out to victims and to try to bring a measure of peace and healing where we can,” he said, acknowledging that “no matter what I do or say, no matter what my colleagues try to do, we’ll probably never really be able to heal those wounds. We pray that God will (heal them).”

He said his experience and that of other bishops and their teams have found that the problem of sexual misconduct in the church is harder to deal with than expected, partly because by its nature, perpetrators hide their behavior.

In addition to that, “the victims feel shame and reticence to come forward, and they’re not always sure they can report with confidence,” he said.

He said those in the church are constantly learning. “It’s certainly become apparent over time that as hard as we’ve worked on this, our policies and procedures have blind spots and shortcomings, and it’s incumbent upon us to address those.”

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops can address such shortcomings in part, to the limit of its authority, Archbishop Lori said. “Local dioceses, including our own, can strengthen at least our reporting policies to make sure that people can report with even greater confidence.”

Archbishop Lori, who as bishop of Bridgeport, Conn., was a member of the committee that drafted the 2002 charter and norms, said the U.S. bishops were already considering a round of changes to the charter and norms even before the allegations against Archbishop McCarrick surfaced this summer.

“What we have to do is to work with the Holy See to develop that clear process by which bishops will be held as accountable as anybody else in the life of the church when it comes to sexual abuse.”

He said the fact that the disciplining of bishops is reserved to the Holy See is one of the reasons that bishops were not mentioned specifically in the 2002 charter. As a member of the drafting committee, he remembers the discussions surrounding that question.

“I can assure you that we did not regard ourselves as bishops as being unaccountable. This was not an attempt to pass a law and then to exempt ourselves,” Archbishop Lori said.

“We understood that including bishops in this would mean that these things which needed the approval of the Holy See would not get the approval of the Holy See (at that time). We also expected fully, as I do now, that the Holy See holds each of us bishops accountable for what we do and that we serve at the pleasure of the Holy Father,” he said.

Just as there has been a change in the way sexual misconduct is handled in the United States - especially in the church - since the early 2000s, there has been a change in the way the Vatican deals with such scandals in the church on a global scale.

When the bishops passed the charter and the norms back in 2002, a delegation of four bishops, including then-Bishop Lori, went to the Vatican “to ensure that the charter and especially the norms, which are actually legislation, would receive the approval of the Holy See,” Archbishop Lori said.

“There was a lot of opposition in the Holy See, even to what we passed,” leading to “several days of fairly difficult meetings,” he said. He also noted that then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later, Pope Benedict XVI) and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith were very helpful in securing approval for the U.S. bishops’ charter and norms.

“Over time, I think the Holy See has recognized that this is a much larger problem in

the life of the church, and in more recent times, we have certainly seen Pope Francis learning how to deal with this on a worldwide basis. He, too, has had a learning curve,” Archbishop Lori said, citing the pope’s “vigorous response” with his recent meeting with the Chilean bishops where he called for the resignations of all the country’s bishops, of which several have been accepted by the pope. He also noted Pope Francis’ action so far in the case of Archbishop McCarrick and actions that could result from a Vatican investigation of the former cardinal.

“You see a great willingness on the part of Pope Francis to be open and transparent about this. And I think that inspires confidence in all of us,” Archbishop Lori said.

Despite all that has been done, there is more work to do, the archbishop said, especially on the moral and spiritual dimensions. “Until and unless we truly repent of this evil in the life of the church, we haven’t gotten hold of it,” he said. “I think sometimes we think we have repented of something and we really haven’t, or at least not to a sufficient degree.”

Bishops especially need to face this in their own prayer life and penitential life, he said. “We really need – I need – to repent of this.” Speaking for himself, he believes the body of bishops must exhibit serious, ongoing repentance. “And the more it strikes home how truly evil this is, the more motivation we’re going to have to do a lot better job in taking care of all the dimensions of this,” Archbishop Lori said.

In a statement released in late July, the archbishop said his heart was rent “in the biblical sense, in the sense of Psalm 51: a broken, contrite heart. Humility is part of being a Christian.

The archbishop echoed Pope Francis, who said in a morning Mass homily in January 2018, “There is no humility without humiliation.”

“We’ve all had humiliation in life,” Archbishop Lori said, “but we bishops ought to be genuinely humiliated over what has happened,” he said.

“That genuine sorrow and contrition and recognition of the enormity of this evil ought to be what motivates us going forward to keep the commitments we have made, to keep them well and wisely and persistently, to teach and preach about this,

and to do what else has to be done to address this,” the archbishop said.

“Will we ever do it perfectly? I wish I could tell you we will – we will not, any more than we do anything else perfectly,” he said.

As a priest for 41 years and as a bishop for 23, Archbishop Lori said he has been dealing with the issue of sexual misconduct in the life of the church since at least the mid-1990s.

The archbishop said the most eye-opening thing for him has been to meet with victims, “to listen to them, to try to understand and appreciate the experience that they had and the ongoing suffering which this has brought about in their life,” he said.

Years ago, when he first began dealing with this issue, he spent time visiting with a number of victims all in a row, all in one day. “When the last person had left, I went back to my office and sat down at my desk and suddenly found myself weeping because it began, a little bit in that moment, to dawn on me what this is,” he said.

“And so, when I offer my sincere apology as a person, as a minister of the church, as archbishop of Baltimore, it’s not just an institutional apology, it’s not just something that I say because it’s got to be said. It’s something I say from my heart,” coming from his experience meeting with victim-survivors, the archbishop said.

“I ask forgiveness. I ask the forgiveness of God, I ask the forgiveness of those with whom I work and whom I’m privileged to serve. But most of all, I ask the forgiveness of any and all who have been victimized by a bishop, by a priest or by anybody else that represents the church, and I simply ask your prayers that as hard as we may have tried in the past to deal with this, we might deal with it a whole lot better going forward,” he said.

*For more information and resources about the archdiocesan response to the abuse crisis, visit **archbalt.org/accountability***

*Read Archbishop Lori’s July 30 statement on accountability in the church **[here](#)**.*

*Listen to a radio interview with Archbishop Lori about accountability **[here](#)**.*

*Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, USCCB president, issued a **statement** Aug. 1 on “Course of Action Responding to Moral Failures on the Part of Church Leaders.”*