

Painful Lessons Learned

By any measure, the allegations of child sexual abuse by a former Penn State University football coach – coupled with the failure of those who knew about the abuse to report it to the appropriate civil authorities – is a sad and horrific situation. It is also tragically familiar.

Some people have commented that it is unfair for the media and others to link the Church to the Penn State situation, given that the Church had no known involvement in the matter, Penn State is a state institution, etc. I would argue that it is a fair comparison, given the similarities between the allegations at Penn State and what we know occurred within our Church.

The question now becomes, will the similarities end there, or will the University respond as the Catholic Church in the United States responded? Will Penn State institute groundbreaking institution-wide reforms in child protection? Will it operate with transparency, weed out and hold abusers accountable, promote healing for victims and lead an overall cultural change in how all those who work and volunteer promote safe environments for children? This is what the Catholic Church has done, and here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore we continue to make this a daily priority in our parishes, schools and other institutions.

For Catholics who have cringed over the last two weeks at any reference to the sexual abuse crisis in the Church with every report from Pennsylvania, I remind you that we must always remember our own failings yet also see that there is reason for optimism and hope. For out of the dark place the Church found itself, the bright light of transparency and accountability has led to many purifying reforms:

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