

The Hope That Lies Before Us

Hello. This is Cardinal Keeler, and for the next five minutes I would like to address matters of importance to all of us, and especially appropriate to this Good Shepherd Sunday.

In recent months we have heard a great deal about some priests who have betrayed their call to holiness through the crime and sin of sexual child abuse. I invite you to join me in praying for the victims.

Prayer, compassion and assistance for the victims of abuse are essential, but not enough.

Since at least the mid-1980's, we in the Archdiocese of Baltimore have, as a matter of policy, reported credible allegations of sexual child abuse to civil authorities.

We also do not place anyone who has been credibly accused of child sexual abuse, regardless of the outcome of any legal action, back into positions where they might harm someone again.

Probably you have seen how we responded, in recent months, to two tragic cases involving lay teachers in Catholic schools who have been accused of sexual child abuse.

We are committed to vigilance - with your assistance. If you are aware of instances of wrongdoing, please let us know. We stand with you in unwavering concern for the safety of our children.

For years, one of the ways we have been working to prevent sexual child abuse is through the screening and evaluation of those who would be priests. Also, we are grateful that the seminaries we use have strong programs of formation in chaste and prayerful living. We need healthy, intelligent, dedicated and spiritual-minded priests to serve the next generation of Catholics here.

Today we are introducing you to a document entitled *The Hope That Lies Before Us*. This document is the culmination of nearly two years of work by a dedicated

committee of priests, deacons, religious women and laypersons, men and women. One of the two basic elements of this report is the encouragement of vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life.

We believe that a vocation is a call from God to serve God's people. We also understand that we have a role in identifying, nurturing and supporting those who are called.

In the coming months we plan to initiate actions, again with your help, to ensure the future of the Church in the Archdiocese of Baltimore through priests dedicated to God and God's people.

Now, as we seek more priests, we are also aware of the many pastoral needs of our people that compete for the service of too few priests. The second basic element of *The Hope That Lies Before Us* calls for creative action to meet the challenges of today and the future.

Of course, any changes will be faithful to Catholic teaching and tradition.

In brief, our efforts will be in the following three directions.

First, we will find new ways to utilize our priests that will enable them to be devoted to the pastoral work that is the essence of the priesthood.

Second, we will encourage religious women and lay ecclesial ministry, in other words, the ministry of religious women and of dedicated and competent laypersons in the Church. This is already happening and we will take additional specific measures to enhance this.

Third, we will continue to emphasize the calling that all of us have through baptism and confirmation. These sacraments call us all to participate in the mission that Jesus gave to the Church, in ways that are appropriate to our own situations in life.

I look forward to working with our priests, religious, deacons and all the Catholic faithful, for these goals. I hope that you will pray for me and with me as we proceed.

God bless you.