



Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley Lenten Letter
Archdiocese of Boston
March 6, 2019

BostonCatholic.org

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we begin the holy season of Lent, this annual time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving affords us the opportunity to be renewed by God's love and mercy as we recommit ourselves to lives of prayer and service to others.

This year, Lent has particular significance for the leadership of the Church at every level, local, national and universal. Recently Pope Francis called bishops from every country in the world to come together at the Vatican for the Summit to Protect Children and Minors. The summit included powerful testimony from survivors of clergy sexual abuse, religious sisters and laypersons who made clear that a meaningful and effective response from the Church is long overdue and of critical importance. I participated in the summit as the President of the Pontifical Commission for Protection of Minors and, with all present, was deeply impacted by those who addressed us.

Given the depth and seriousness of the crisis and the failures of the leadership of the Church, the expectations for the meeting were high and people are anxious to see concrete results. I left the meeting convinced that no bishop could possibly say that his diocese is not affected by these issues or that this is not a problem in his country and culture. Patience among our people and in the wider community is exhausted and understandably the call is rising for effective action.

A dominant theme at the meeting was the need for an effective reporting mechanism when a Bishop or Cardinal has failed in his duty to protect children or has himself abused children or vulnerable adults. Although I believe an effective set of procedures will be developed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I nonetheless wish to address this need immediately for the Archdiocese of Boston.

To that end I have decided to implement EthicsPoint, a confidential, anonymous and third-party system, exclusively for the reporting of misconduct by a Cardinal, Bishop or Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Boston. Since 2011 we have utilized EthicsPoint for concerns of potential ethics violations, financial improprieties, and other violations of the Archdiocesan Code of Conduct related to financial matters.

Like the existing system currently in use, this will be web based and have a toll-free hotline to make a report. Reports will be sent to members of my Independent Review Board who will be charged to immediately notify law enforcement for claims of abuse as well as the apostolic nuncio; the diplomatic representative to the U.S. of the Holy See. The system will be hosted on secured servers at the EthicsPoint facility and is not connected to the Archdiocese of Boston website, intranet system or the existing EthicsPoint system currently in use. We anticipate the system being up and running soon and will provide more information at that time.

In January 2002 the clergy sexual abuse crisis was revealed by the media in powerful and compelling reports on the failures of the Church to protect children. Courageous survivors came forward and forced the Church to face the crisis and accept responsibility for the crimes committed against them. That same year the American Bishops implemented the Dallas Charter of Norms. Where it has been faithfully implemented, it has been effective. But we must aggressively build on the Charter to ensure that there are clear paths for reporting misdeeds of the hierarchy by utilizing the expertise of independent lay professionals.

During the meeting in Rome, the most powerful moments were when survivors of abuse spoke to us. This confirmed my own experience. The way forward for the Church is to hold as a priority the voices and experience of survivors, to keep them close to every step we take and make all possible efforts to provide the means for them to be heard. In Boston we will continue to provide pastoral care and counseling for survivors. We will continue to carry out programs of prevention and education in our schools and parishes. We will continue to do background checks annually for bishops, priests, all archdiocesan personnel, and all volunteers who work with children and young people. You may find the depth and breadth of those efforts in the Archdiocese of Boston on our dedicated website at <https://commitment.bostoncatholic.org/>.

For more than twenty-six years my ministry has involved responding to the abuse of minors by clergy. The crisis of sexual abuse by clergy is the greatest failure of the Church in my lifetime. It has eroded our moral authority, it endangers our pastoral, social and educational ministry, but worst of all, it devastates children and families.

We must face our past with transparency. Those who were sexually abused by clergy, their families and loved ones must always be the central focus of our response to the crisis. Their courage in coming forward has forced the Church to face the crimes committed against them. We are committed to accompanying them on their journey toward healing. Often it is survivors who teach us not to lose hope.

As we strive to live this season with renewed seriousness and commitment we pray and work for renewal in the life of the Church. We are firmly committed to zero tolerance, transparency and accountability, at all times holding survivors as the priority, always being vigilant to do all possible to prevent any harm to children.

With the assurance of my prayers for you and your loved ones,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, OFM, Cap.