



LETTER FROM FR. TOM RAFFERTY

Pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, The Woodlands, TX

AUGUST 4, 2018

Dear Parish Family,

I want to speak with you today about the disturbing scandals that are impacting our Church. At a time when the moral voice and authority of the Catholic Church is needed the most in society, sexual abuse scandals have threatened its credibility.

The recent charges that have come about concern high ranking clergy – specifically bishops and cardinals – who used their position and power to coerce and abuse innocent men and adolescents. Furthermore, they seemingly insulated themselves from the very processes that would root out predators and provide safety to others. Strong evidence, as indicated in recent news reports, suggests that *former-cardinal* McCarrick sexually abused and assaulted young men in his seminary. These men often felt humiliated, intimidated, and powerless – and like so many other victims – were frequently ignored by the very Church whose existence is to save, to heal, and to love. Not only was abuse occurring, but even worse was the lack of transparency in handling the matter. **This must stop at all levels of the Church.**

These words from our Lord, “*they are like sheep without a shepherd*” in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 9:36), echo the serious crisis of faith and life we are experiencing as so many members of the Body of Christ feel scandalized by the hypocrisy of some church leaders. Moreover, the clergy and lay church employees, innocent of such horrors, often find themselves lumped in with the guilty and are viewed with suspicion and hostility. **This is not what Christ wanted for his Church.**

To any victims of abuse and sexual assault, know that ***your sufferings do not go unheard***, but in Christ Jesus, himself a victim of injustice and who also still bears those wounds, he hears you louder and deeper than words can express. As Pope Benedict XVI said to the Catholics of Ireland, “*Yet Christ’s own wounds, transformed by his redemptive sufferings are the very means by which the power of evil is broken and we are reborn to life and hope.*”

It is my desire that these evil powers be broken, that wounds be healed, and that life and hope reign in you. Repentance and reform, **not mere words**, are required to go forward. Those who have done such evils must examine themselves, take responsibility, and own up to the immense harm they have done.

As your pastor, I cannot fix every sin that has ever occurred or will occur in the global Church. However, I can do everything in my power to make sure that our local parish is never part of the problem. I want to assure everyone at St. Anthony of Padua that **precautions have been taken** in

our parish to protect our young people and all vulnerable who come for help, including background checks and safe environment training to name a few. As a parish staff composed almost entirely of laity with families – many with young and adolescent children – you can be assured that we are working for the safety and the salvation of all our families. I implore you, if you see something or have experienced something abusive to *contact the local authorities*. It is my hope that our parish will be a **community of transparency** so that the mission of Christ can be fulfilled in all of us and we can begin the healing process that our Church so desperately needs.

I thank you for your continued support of our parish and ask that you join me in praying earnestly for the healing of victims and that justice be brought to those who have afflicted the vulnerable.

Yours In Christ,



Fr. Tom Rafferty

Pastor

TRANSPARENCY & SAFETY PROCEDURES

For St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church

- All volunteers, staff, and clergy over the age of 18 have been VIRTUS certified before being allowed to work or volunteer with minors and vulnerable adults. We have completed a VIRTUS audit in 2018 to ensure that all these adults are in compliance and have received the necessary recertification that is required every 3-5 years.
- All employees and clergy of the parish have been background checked before employment by St. Anthony of Padua.
- Within the past year a new Parish Leadership Team has been implemented made up of the pastor, a deacon, and 4 lay staff members. All decisions made at St. Anthony of Padua are cleared through this leadership team providing extensive input and transparency to parish procedures, reporting, and operations from the laity.
- The Pastoral Council, Finance Councils, and Stewardship Council are entirely run by lay members of our parish who are not employed by the parish and have term limits. These councils provide advisory and oversight to the pastor, clergy, and lay employees. Members of the parish staff cannot be members of these three councils.
- Staff and clergy receive ongoing training and resources regarding safe environment procedures. This year we will be adding a component of training through “Elijah Rising” for staff to be able to identify victims of sex trafficking that could be encountered in our local community.
- All staff, clergy, ministry leaders, and parishioners are instructed to contact local civil authorities if you suspect any sort of abuse on our campus or at parish functions (even off campus) **before** contacting someone at the parish or Archdiocese.