



Toward a Fair and Reasonable Way Forward

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.
September 25, 2018

To the people of the Archdiocese:

Dear friends,

On Friday, September 21, the bishops of Pennsylvania issued a [joint statement](#) pledging substantial new financial aid for victims of clergy sexual abuse in decades past. I want to underline our commitment to helping abuse survivors, whether their claims are time-barred or not.

Perennial critics of the Church may dismiss the bishops' statement; this is a regrettable part of today's ugly political environment. But our local Church has proven the sincerity and scope of her commitment since I arrived here as Archbishop seven years ago. In fact, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Victims' Assistance Program has quietly served hundreds of abuse victims and their families for more than 15 years and underwritten their therapy and care in an amount totaling more than \$18 million. This outreach has been done without concern for the status of a survivor's potential legal case or any risk of litigation. And we're committed to dedicating substantially *more* resources to the task of helping survivors, unless destructive, retroactive statute of limitations legislation makes that impossible.

Civil litigation of formerly time-barred cases is a lengthy, bitter, and expensive process, typically involving years of court proceedings and appeals. The perpetrators of abuse are often deceased, and the overwhelming majority of people who bear the burden of any legal penalties are innocent current members of the Church. In many cases diocesan bankruptcy is the result, with parishes and ministries very much at risk.

Civil litigation also puts many millions of dollars in the hands of plaintiffs' and defense attorneys -- money better spent directly on survivor compensation and care. This is one of the reasons public institutions defend their very modest financial caps on abuse-related settlements so vigorously. No such caps apply for the Church.

To put it simply, we seek to build, or help to build, a fair and reasonable program to address the pain and prevalence of sexual abuse. We believe that *any* program of survivor support -- whether private or public -- must have neutral, experienced professionals to determine awards in an environment of complete transparency. It should focus on confidentiality at the request of victims but also ensure that

they can tell their stories, which belong to them and must remain solely in their control. Finally, the focus of the care should meet survivors where they are right now, and do everything possible to provide what each victim needs, helping them to heal and move forward in the best way possible.

With or without state action, the Archdiocese will substantially expand its on-going support for victims to compensate and care for as many survivors as possible. To that task, and the task of doing everything we can to cleanse the Church and her ministries of abuse in the future, we are fully committed.

Sincerely yours in Jesus Christ,

*+Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.
Archbishop of Philadelphia*