



## St. Vincent de Paul Church

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January 29, 2019

His Excellency, Christophe Pierre  
Apostolic Nuncio to the United States  
3339 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20008

Cc: His Eminence, Blase Cardinal Cupich  
Archbishop of Chicago  
Organizing Committee Member  
Vatican Global Bishops Meeting February 2019

Dear Archbishop Pierre,

Thank you for agreeing to serve as an ambassador to the faithful in the United States. We representatives of a faith community from Baltimore, Maryland are excited to communicate with you prior to the global bishops' meeting at the Vatican in February. We have a mandate from our community to share with you the concerns, thoughts and suggestions that have come from the hearts of people who have experienced many misgivings and deep pain over the clergy sexual abuse crisis. Our input has come from much work on the part of our parish community. We have held town meetings, conducted surveys, accumulated statistics, and conducted research. This letter is an offering, a willingness to let you know that the people of God want you to succeed in the healthy transformation of the Church. We shall pray for all of you at the meeting in February. We shall also pay close attention as we listen and observe the work of the participants. We wish you grace and wisdom.

Our first priority, as is yours, must be the welfare of those persons who were abused. However, we believe the pending global meeting of the bishops also offers a powerful opportunity to create new structures, processes and procedures that will renew and promote trust, hope, healing and faith both in the clergy and laity. Improved openness, communication, collegiality, and respect for one another will enhance the richness of Word

and Sacrament in the lives of the faithful. These have been sadly tarnished due to the clergy sexual abuse crisis and the ways in which it has been handled.

In 2013 when Pope Francis issued *Evangelii gaudium*, we were offered a challenge to proceed to appropriate some deep and radical reforms in the Church. The Pope has provided us a blueprint, Cardinal Parolin suggested, one that calls for a paradigm shift. This would mean a more decentralized, synodal and missionary Church. Pope Francis reminds us that his own sense of how we repair the lack of credibility is that we “*bring people together and get them enthused and confident about a broad, shared project that is at once unassuming, solid, sober and transparent.*” Later in the letter to the bishops during their January retreat (2019), His Holiness called for *metanoia*. We know and believe that this is a fundamental change of mind and heart.

We are ready for fundamental changes. For example, we propose that the organizing committee for the global meeting and subsequently those at the global meeting in February invite the heads of all religious orders to be present and make suggestions. We suggest further that a diversity of laity be included in both planning and participation.

We long to see transparency, true collegiality and healing between clergy and laity. We support a new format that helps to bring about better communication. Communication must occur on a regular basis within and among all levels: parish, diocesan, national and international. Authentic communication welcomes a variety of perspectives. Healing can occur only when the clergy and laity truly listen to and hear one another. This new spirit is one that will help to operationalize the Gospel and promote a movement from proclamation to praxis. This is a spiritual process that is humbly inclusive of all.

Again, we echo the words of the Holy Father in his letter to the Bishops of the U.S. during their January retreat. Pope Francis acknowledged that we are experiencing a twofold crisis, one of abuse and one of shattered credibility. He challenged the bishops to combat both of these crises. Our leaders cannot be alone in the implementation of this challenge. Please know the People of God have been confronting these issues. So we invite you to hear our willingness to participate at all levels. We have many gifts to share with you. We realize that a collegial approach will be necessary in order to promote reconciliation and healing during this sad and difficult period of church history.

When he addressed the clergy sexual abuse crisis, Cardinal Sean O'Malley said, “This is a critical moment for the universal church.” He continued to say that the February meeting offers an opportunity “for developing a clear path forward for dioceses around the world.” We write to you because we have come to learn in our faith community that we, the People of God can and do make all things new. We believe that you too, Archbishop Pierre, believe this and want this for the Church's future. At the fall assembly of bishops in Baltimore, Archbishop, you said that bishops in the United States need to work hard to regain the trust of the People of God and combat clericalism. We agree with you and respectfully recommend that the bishops and the laity work together to resolve these issues.

May those at the global meeting keep uppermost in their minds that the *sensus fidelium* is very present in the Church today. It is indeed *our Church*, and the sense of the faithful reminds us that the very concrete experiences of believers who are living the faith provide the grace and the capacity to discern religious truth. The *sensus fidelium* reminds us that there are laypersons who have much to teach the Church. We can observe and trust that often it is the “parishioner” who perceives Christ’s presence even without institutional guidance and subsequently lives out His message. May we, clergy and laity together be mutual bearers of the Logos to one another and our world.

Respectfully yours in Christ,



Amber Hendricks  
Chair, St. Vincent’s Ad Hoc Committee on Church Reform  
On behalf of the committee and the parish

**St. Vincent’s Ad Hoc Committee on Church Reform**

M. Patricia Ball  
James Casey  
Fr. Ray Chase, Pastor  
Maureen Daly  
Geraldine Fialkowski  
Raymond Heil  
Amber Hendricks, Chair  
Michael Jacko, President, Parish Council  
Colleen McCahill, Pastoral Associate  
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