February 17, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As bishop of Richmond, one of my significant pastoral responsibilities is to reach out to victim survivors of clergy sexual abuse, and to be a resource for them on their paths of healing. To that end, I am announcing the next step in honoring this commitment. Beginning today, the Catholic Diocese of Richmond is establishing an Independent Reconciliation Program to assist in the healing of those who were sexually abused as minors by Catholic clergy.

Reconciliation is a complex matter. The Sacrament of Confession, for example, is intended to reconcile us with the Lord. Yet, the sacrament requires more than just identifying and apologizing for sins. There is an element of the sacrament that demands steps be taken toward repairing the damage that has been done. We must identify these sins, express contrition for them, and offer some form of recompense. On September 14, 2018, during our Mass of Atonement at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, I stated, “to those who experienced abuse: Christ hears you. The Body of Christ suffers with you. The Church hears you, hears your cries, and desires to respond in charity and in justice to those cries.”

As your bishop, I have personally heard those cries. I have met with and learned from victim survivors of clergy sexual abuse – hearing first-hand the enormously profound impact these grave violations of sacred trust have had on their lives. Since my installation and in keeping with my pledge to promote healing, I have taken a number of steps including: the Masses of Atonement and regional listening sessions, publishing a list of clergy against whom there have been credible and substantiated allegations of sexual abuse and instituting the diocese’s building-naming policy.

We have watched as dioceses throughout the country have embraced reconciliation programs similar to this program and noted the benefit to victim survivors. This program – designed and managed by a nationally recognized and highly respected, independent claims administrator – gives victim survivors an opportunity to receive monetary payment in a manner that is compassionate. The program is completely voluntary. To learn more about the program, visit: www.RichmondDioceseIRP.com.

We will never be able to fully compensate for the harm done and we recognize there are many routes that might be followed to achieve justice. We believe this to be the best course for our diocese to reach a just reconciliation with our victim survivors.

I ask for your continued prayers for victim survivors, that in their healing they find comfort and peace.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout
Bishop of Richmond