News



Pope Francis talks with Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston, president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, as they arrive for a meeting in the synod hall at the Vatican Feb. 13, 2015. (CNS/Paul Haring)

by Catholic News Service

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Boston — July 25, 2018

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Updated at 10:30 a.m. central time: NCR added to this story the full text of Cardinal O'Malley's statement. The statement was posted to the website of the Archdiocese of Boston, but that link was not working earlier today.

Updated again at 3:40 p.m. central time.

Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley said "a major gap still exists" when it comes to the Catholic Church's policies on sexual abuse and conduct as it pertains, not just to priests, but in cases of accusations against cardinals and bishops.

It was a clear reference to recent sex abuse allegations made against Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the retired archbishop of Washington.

While the church in the United States has clear procedures when it comes to investigating such accusations against priests, "we must have clearer procedures for cases involving bishops," O'Malley wrote in a statement issued late July 24.

The church needs a strong and comprehensive policy "to address bishops' violations of the vows of celibacy in the cases of criminal abuse of minors and in the cases involving adults," the statement said.

He acknowledged what the Archdiocese of New York called "a credible and substantiated allegation" involving a minor and McCarrick when the prelate was a priest in that archdiocese, and its investigation of a second incident there also involving a minor and then-Fr. McCarrick.

"These cases require more than apologies," he says, adding that any new report of abuse "creates doubt in the minds of many that we are effectively addressing this catastrophe in the church."

O'Malley called for "three specific actions" to immediately address allegations of sexual abuse of minors and "sexual improprieties" with seminarians made against McCarrick, starting with "a fair and rapid adjudication of these accusations."

Second, there must be "an assessment of the adequacy of our standards and policies in the church at every level, and especially in the case of bishops," he said in a statement issued late July 24. "And third, communicating more clearly to the Catholic faithful and to all victims the process for reporting allegations against

bishops and cardinals."

"Failure to take these actions will threaten and endanger the already weakened moral authority of the church and can destroy the trust required for the church to minister to Catholics and have a meaningful role in the wider civil society," O'Malley said.

The cardinal, who is president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, issued the statement in response to articles in the national media over the past several days that "have reported accusations of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick's sexual improprieties with several adults and his criminal violations of the sexual abuse of minors."

"These alleged actions, when committed by any person, are morally unacceptable and incompatible with the role of a priest, bishop or cardinal," Cardinal O'Malley said.

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In late June, McCarrick, the 88-year-old retired archbishop of Washington, said he would no longer exercise any public ministry "in obedience" to the Vatican after an allegation he abused a teenager 47 years ago in the Archdiocese of New York was found credible. The cardinal has said he is innocent.

O'Malley added: "In this moment there is no greater imperative for the church than to hold itself accountable to address these matters, which I will bring to my upcoming meetings with the Holy See with great urgency and concern."

He also addressed news reports that say he received a letter from Dominican Father Boniface Ramsey on June 25, 2015, about McCarrick's conduct with seminarians. He said he did not "personally receive" the correspondence and a review "at the staff level" did not determine that its contents were under "the purview of the (pontifical) commission or the Archdiocese of Boston."

"In every instance of claims made by victims of sexual abuse, whether criminal violations or the abuse of power, the primary concern must be for the victim, their family and their loved ones," O'Malley said.

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Following is the full text of Cardinal O'Malley's statement.

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Statement of Cardinal Seán P. O’Malley, OFM Cap

Archbishop of Boston

Tuesday, July 24, 2018

"For the past several days, articles in the national media have reported accusations of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick’s sexual improprieties with several adults and his criminal violations of the sexual abuse of minors. These alleged actions, when committed by any person, are morally unacceptable and incompatible with the role of a priest, bishop or cardinal.

I am deeply troubled by these reports that have traumatized many Catholics and members of the wider community. In one case involving a minor the Archdiocese of New York, after investigation, has found the accusation to be credible and substantiated. While another accusation concerning a minor is yet to be investigated, the reports are devastating for the victims, their families and for the Church itself. Each new report of clerical abuse at any level creates doubt in the minds of many that we are effectively addressing this catastrophe in the Church.

These cases and others require more than apologies. They raise up the fact that when charges are brought regarding a bishop or a cardinal, a major gap still exists in the Church’s policies on sexual conduct and sexual abuse. While the Church in the United States has adopted a zero tolerance policy regarding the sexual abuse of minors by priests we must have clearer procedures for cases involving bishops. Transparent and consistent protocols are needed to provide justice for the victims and to adequately respond to the legitimate indignation of the community. The Church needs a strong and comprehensive policy to address bishops’ violations of the vows of celibacy in cases of the criminal abuse of minors and in cases involving adults.

My experience in several dioceses and my work with the members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors have brought me to this conclusion. The Church needs to swiftly and decisively take action regarding these matters of critical importance. In every instance of claims made by victims of sexual abuse, whether criminal violations or the abuse of power, the primary concern must be for the victim, their family and their loved ones. The victims are to be commended for bringing to light their tragic experience and must be treated with respect and dignity. Recent media reports also have referenced a letter sent to me from Rev. Boniface Ramsey, O.P. in June of 2015, which I did not personally receive. In keeping with the practice for matters concerning the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, at the staff level the letter was reviewed and determined that the matters presented did not fall under the purview of the Commission or the Archdiocese of Boston, which was shared with Fr. Ramsey in reply.

These accusations are understandably a source of great disappointment and anger for many. These cases, involving a cardinal, must be viewed in light of the last two decades of the Church’s experience with clerical sexual abuse. It is my conviction that three specific actions are required at this time. First, a fair and rapid adjudication of these accusations; second, an assessment of the adequacy of our standards and policies in the Church at every level, and especially in the case of bishops; and third, communicating more clearly to the Catholic faithful and to all victims the process for reporting allegations against bishops and cardinals. Failure to take these actions will threaten and endanger the already weakened moral authority of the Church and can destroy the trust required for the Church to minister to Catholics and have a meaningful role in the wider civil society. In this moment there is no greater imperative for the Church than to hold itself accountable to address these matters, which I will bring to my upcoming meetings with the Holy See with great urgency and concern."