News



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The Association of U.S. Catholic Priests said its members are "sad ... angry ... frustrated" over continued reports involving fellow priests and a lack of accountability by bishops.

"At every level, our church is in pain," the 1,200-member organization said Aug. 17.

The organization cited concerns over a Pennsylvania grand jury report that recounts seven decades of child sex abuse claims throughout six Catholic dioceses in the state, the recent resignation of Archbishop Theodore McCarrick from the College of Cardinals over allegations he is an abuser, an investigation into alleged improper activities at a Boston seminary, and clergy abuse in Australia and Chile.

Fr. Bob Bonnot, chairman of the association's leadership team, told Catholic News Service that repeated revelations about improper clergy behavior are "something

that has flared up more frequently than any of us wish to remember."

"We suffer with the Catholic people. While all of us priests and the Catholic people are not suffering nearly as much as the families and the individuals who have been abused, we need to let them know we're suffering too," said the retired priest of the Diocese of Youngstown, Ohio.

"People need recognition and encouragement that they're not alone in their feelings," Bonnot added.

The organization's statement also serves to support the vast majority of Catholic clergy who have not been accused of wrongdoing and "to raise the voice of hope and joy, a pastoral voice to those within the church and society," he said.

The association offered a series of recommendations to Catholic leaders as they formulate their response to resolve the challenges posed by the recent revelations. First on the list was a call to "those responsible for the scandals" who "must publicly apologize and ask forgiveness for what they have done and what they have failed to do."

The AUSCP statement also repeated the organization's call for reform of the seminary formation process "to make it effective and adequate for our times."

In March, the priests' organization called for revisions in the way seminarians are prepared for ministry so that the U.S. Catholic Church can better address challenges that include declining membership and falling seminary enrollment. It urged that priests get closer to the people they serve and better understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus as envisioned by Pope Francis.

Priestly formation must include faithfulness to the outcome of the Second Vatican Council, a call to a life of service to God and God's people, and "authentic human psychosexual development" of seminarians, the association said. In addition, it called for women to be involved in the "formation and decisive discernment of candidates for priesthood and integrated at every level, from top to bottom, in the power structure of the church."

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The association's stance earlier was detailed in a March 29 letter and eight-page document addressed to Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. The committee, is reviewing the Program for Priestly Formation, the fifth and most recent edition of which was published in 2006. Committee members are expecting to submit revisions for a new edition of the guide at the November 2019 USCCB fall general assembly.

The new statement also offered prayers that all members of the church, including clergy and laypeople be given "the strength to root out the pride and ambition of clericalism and its scandalous behavior."

Finally, the association offered support to Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, USCCB president, for his efforts to investigate the situation surrounding McCarrick, establish a new channel for reporting complaints against bishops and advocacy for more effective resolution of future complaints.

While the AUSCP represents a minority of priests, Bonnot said the organization felt it was important to respond to the rash of new related to clergy abuse by offering a "constructive and collaborative contribution to the issues we all face."

"If we don't speak, there is nothing for them to hear," he told CNS.

"We want to be party to continue the effort to abolish this kind of behavior and the kind of attitude that leads to that behavior."