

by Terence McKiernan

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Editor's note: Following is a reprint, with permission, of a letter written to Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich from Terence McKiernan, president of BishopsAccountability.org. It is posted in full here.

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich

Archbishop of Chicago

Archdiocese of Chicago

835 N. Rush Street

Chicago IL 60611-2030

Your Eminence,

I am writing to you about the upcoming summit in Rome. One of your colleagues in planning the event, Cardinal Oswaldo Gracias, says that I should be worried, and I am. "Either it will be successful, or it will be a disaster for the Church."

But while I write you this letter, you and your brother bishops are beginning a retreat at Mundelein led by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, O.F.M. Cap., the Preacher to the Papal Household. This is the same Cantalamessa who once compared criticism of clergy abuse in the Church to "the more shameful aspects of anti-Semitism." Survivors of clergy abuse are the retreat masters you need now.

You and Cardinal Gracias and Archbishop Scicluna and Fr. Zollner advised the conference presidents to "reach out and visit with victim survivors of clergy sex abuse in your respective countries prior to the meeting in Rome, to learn first-hand the suffering that they have endured." This is good advice. Will Cardinal DiNardo start with La Rosa Lopez survivor J.H., or with M.V., who spoke to police about the "duplicity of Cardinal DiNardo"?

This is one problem with the summit. Many of the conference presidents are the wrong men for the job, and the people know it.

Another problem, especially for you and your brother bishops in the United States, is that you are between a rock and a hard place — in your case, between Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Attorney General-elect Kwame Raoul on the one hand, and those African and Asian bishops who would rather try to avoid the abuse problem in their countries on the other. Any summit outcome that pleases the abuse deniers will enrage your people back home. Especially after the U.S. bishops were silenced by Pope Francis in Baltimore.

You've spoken of "a change of culture," of responsiveness, accountability, and transparency. But the sad fact is that transparency always seems to be forced on the Catholic church, as it was by Attorney General Josh Shapiro and the 40th Grand Jury in their report. The culture change you say you seek always comes from outside.

Your Charter and Norms were forced on you, but under duress you have become a reluctant bellwether for the bishops in other countries on the abuse issue. But will they follow you where you need to go? Will you go there? A summit that ends in apologies and platitudes will not be a disappointment; it will be a catastrophe.

Instead, the summit must call on Pope Francis to exercise his power. He must reconstitute and reaffirm the Pontifical Commission, rename survivors to it, meet with them regularly, make them the radical body the church needs, not a disrespected joke. He must open the CDF archives, publish the names and vota of every laicized and prayer and penance priest worldwide, including information on the bishops and order superiors who criminally mishandled those cases. He must create a powerful process for bishop accountability in the curia and name Archbishop Scicluna to run it, and survivors and experts from outside the curia to staff it. The shambles of the tribunal and As a Loving Mother must be sorted out.

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Cardinal DiNardo must draw a line in the sand and insist on these changes and zero tolerance globally, based on improved U.S. Norms. He must insist that the religious institutes, which have been given a free pass, be held accountable. He must insist that the church no longer shelter behind weak local reporting laws.

He must drive a hard bargain, or break with the summit if it does not have the courage to vote for these reforms.

Back in the United States, he must lead the USCCB to real reforms in June, whether Pope Francis likes it or not. You and your brother bishops must hold yourselves to a higher standard, and truly include survivors and laity in that reckoning. You must stop your expensive lobbying for predator-friendly statutes of limitations.

You must make it USCCB policy that member bishops maintain full transparency regarding their accused bishops, priests, and religious — no exceptions, no taking advantage of the many gaps. You must include the accused religious, the deceased, the externs. As you know, my organization has been tracking your progress on this project, and you've made some progress, it's true.

But so much remains to be done. Your own list and posted documents are fatally flawed. Your lawyers advised your predecessor to require all survivors' witness to be deleted and summarized in the documents, and your list is far from state-of-the-art. Is it complete? Attorney General Madigan doesn't seem to think so.

Everyone is watching how you and Cardinal DiNardo and Cardinal O'Malley perform in Rome and then back home. The Catholic Church in the United States hangs in the

balance. Meanwhile, the attorneys general are investigating.

Sincerely,

Terence McKiernan

President

BishopAccountability.org

cc: Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio; Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley O.F.M. Cap.; Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo