



January 28, 2020

To our priests, deacons and pastoral coordinators,

I'm sure many of you have seen today's headlines ([Seattle Times](#), [Seattle P-I](#) and separately a deep dive into credibly accused lists on [ProPublica](#)). I want to reach out and share my thoughts with you about today's news.

I have not yet officially reviewed the letter from the Heal Our Church group, which was delivered Friday afternoon when I was out. I wish they had given me the opportunity to review the letter and enter into a real dialog with them before going public, especially since I share some of this group's concerns.

First, our commitment to victims of abuse and their families is paramount and must not be overlooked. We must continue to share our expression of sorrow for what they have endured and acknowledge the serious impact abuse has on their lives. We must also continue to protect their privacy, which is at the heart of the issue today.

Unfortunately, I think many of the requests outlined in the media story are misinformed. As you know,

- We are committed to transparency, which is why we recently updated our [Protect & Heal website](#) with new information, including new financial information. We did this, voluntarily, because it's the right thing to do regarding transparency and rebuilding trust.
- We already have a highly qualified independent Review Board composed primarily of lay experts.
- We already completed an independent review of our clergy files in 2015 prior to releasing the 2016 list of credibly accused. This was a comprehensive review conducted by a team of laypeople from Kinsale Management Consulting, who reported the findings directly to the Review Board.
- A comprehensive study of the causes for the sexual abuse crisis was already conducted and published in 2011 by John Jay College. (Read more about it [here](#).)
- We already have many lay women and men involved in high-level decision-making roles at the archdiocese.

Ultimately, the issue we face is really about trust. Our effort to build trust is much broader than the issues identified by this group. It requires everyone. I have been saying since I arrived here (and for 10 years as a bishop) we need to do more to engage the lay faithful and call forth their gifts for accomplishing the mission of the church, which belongs to all the baptized. This is one of the reasons why we're in the process of re-establishing an archdiocesan Pastoral Council, which gives us a greater opportunity to engage lay women and men to help us become a more mission-oriented church.

As archbishop, I am asked to shepherd our flock, which means I must listen to the concerns of our people and prayerfully discern how we may address them. At some point after my *ad limina* visit, I will engage with this group, and I'll keep you informed on how that unfolds.

Lastly, I simply wish to acknowledge the toll all of this takes on you as priests and the impact it has on all our people. Please continue to pray for victims of abuse and their families, for the healing of our Church, and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit for all who make up this one family of faith in Western Washington we know, love and serve.

In the heart of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul D. Etienne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning of the first name.

Most Reverend Paul D. Etienne, DD, STL
Archbishop of Seattle

