

DIOCESE OF SCRANTON  
300 WYOMING AVENUE  
SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA 18503-1279

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

August 31, 2018

Dear Friends,

The Fortieth Statewide Grand Jury Report released earlier this month shared the tragic details of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania over the past seventy years. The report focused not only on abusive priests, but also brought increased attention to the role of those who enabled such abuse to continue. Thus, I took the unprecedented step of asking the Independent Review Board of the Diocese of Scranton to review how Bishop James Timlin handled allegations and his role in all cases prior to the *Dallas Charter* in 2002. I recently received a recommendation from the Independent Review Board.

As background, the board – comprised of three lay persons, a religious sister and a religious priest – is a confidential consultative body put in place to advise a bishop on the assessment of allegations of abuse. These individuals are highly qualified and equipped to assist me with this decision, as each boasts expertise related to law enforcement, education, counseling or victim advocacy. Their combined experience brings a unique perspective that I simply do not have. Though it is unusual for a sitting bishop to review a prior bishop, I insisted the board use the same process for Bishop Timlin as is used for any accused priest or lay person.

I understand that it is unfair to judge past actions against present day standards. However, I also know that the Church could have – should have – done more to protect our children. We cannot ignore this fact today.

It is with this context that I share my decision around Bishop Timlin. After much thought and with careful consideration of the recommendation from the Independent Review Board, I have decided to permanently restrict Bishop Timlin from representing the Diocese of Scranton at all public events, liturgical or otherwise.

This is the fullest extent that my authority permits me to act relative to another bishop. I have, though, also referred this matter to the Vatican Congregation for Bishops, which has jurisdiction over additional aspects of Bishop Timlin's ministry. This was not a decision that was taken lightly.

It is important that I make this very clear: Bishop Timlin did not abuse children, nor has he ever been accused of having done so. Instead, he mishandled some cases of abuse. He presided over the Diocese of Scranton for nearly 20 years – a time in which the Diocese fell short of its duty to protect children. And, in many of the cases detailed in the Grand Jury report, Bishop Timlin fell short, too. While he followed the existing rules and policies when handling most of these cases, there was more he could have done to protect children.

Some have asked why I did not restrict Bishop Timlin from publicly representing the Diocese of Scranton sooner, given the information that was shared in the Grand Jury report. Frankly, when I became Bishop in 2010, my concern at the time was not with Bishop Timlin, but on the need to keep predator priests out of ministry and to create environments in which our children would be safe. Bishop Timlin had no administrative role within the Diocese at the time, and had been out of office for seven years by the time of my appointment. Yet, the sobering report of the statewide Grand Jury has shown me that I could have done more in this regard immediately upon my appointment to Bishop. It has also caused me to reflect on my own role in handling allegations of abuse in the Church, too. To those who feel I betrayed their trust in me by allowing Bishop Timlin to continue to minister publicly in the Diocese of Scranton since his retirement, I apologize.

The Grand Jury report has not only compelled me to review the actions of Bishop Timlin but also to consider my role and past actions in protecting children. As many of you know, I have been a priest of the Diocese of Scranton for 35 years. Prior to becoming your Bishop in 2010, I served in numerous parish and administrative assignments. For three years from 1995 to 1998, I served as Vicar for Priests under Bishop Timlin. In that role, I became aware of accusations that were brought against several priests. In those cases, priests were ultimately permanently removed from ministry, in two instances as many as five years before the *Charter for the Protection of Youth and Young Adults*' mandate of zero tolerance for credibly accused priests was enacted in the United States.

In 2002, I was appointed to an ad hoc committee to review certain files pertaining to several men who had been accused of abuse. The task of this committee was to make recommendations to the Bishop to ensure that all men credibly accused of abuse were removed from ministry, as mandated by the *Charter* – not to assess how Bishop Timlin handled cases of abuse. Following this extensive review process, 10 men were removed from ministry.

Following Bishop Timlin's retirement in 2003, Bishop Joseph Martino led the Diocese and served for nearly seven years before I took office. Bishop Martino also carefully reviewed the Diocese's response to the *Dallas Charter*, taking into account both the terms of the *Charter* and canonical processes.

Since my appointment in 2010, I have been hyper-focused on keeping our children safe, both by ensuring that no credibly accused individual remain in ministry, and also by closely following the *Dallas Charter* and our own Safe Environment Program. When I took office in 2010, I twice commissioned complete reviews of all Diocesan files – again – to make sure no credibly accused man was in ministry. I have also twice revised our policies and procedures to make necessary improvements along the way.

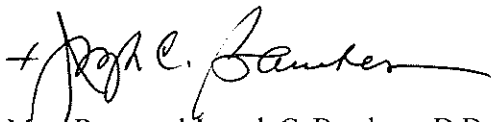
I can tell you with full confidence that, since I became your Bishop, every single allegation of abuse has been reported to civil authorities and Pennsylvania Child Line. Every credibly accused priest has been removed from ministry. And the public has been notified of every priest removed from ministry as a result of an allegation of abuse.

Based on a thorough review of the Grand Jury report, we have found that 93 percent of the abuse detailed in the report occurred before 2000, showing what we already know to be true: reforms in the United States – and our prevention efforts – are working as the occurrences of abuse have been drastically reduced over the last two decades.

Despite these vigilant efforts, we know there is more work to be done, and we must constantly review and update our policies and procedures. The Grand Jury report has caused me – and many of my peers – to look at past events, decisions and decision makers through a different prism.

After thoughtful reflection and prayers, I recognize that there have been times when I, too, could have done better. I ask for your forgiveness in these instances and promise you now – I will continue to do all that is in my power to ensure the safety of our youth moving forward. That has and always will be my priority as Bishop.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph C. Bambera". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L.  
Bishop of Scranton