

Bishop Persico Remarks
Faith Formation Pastoral Planning Initiative
Vicariate Meetings
October 23-25, 2018

Thank you, Father, for your hospitality and welcome this evening. I'm grateful to all of you for being here tonight.

We've all been through a great deal since we gathered a year ago.

I know we are eager to delve into faith formation, which is essentially the most important aspect of pastoral planning for our diocese.

But before we turn our attention to that topic, I think you'll agree, we need to spend a little time together talking about the fact that we've been at ground zero in the clergy sexual abuse crisis.

In a few minutes, I'm going to make brief remarks about the grand jury, and then open the floor to questions. I'm expecting that may last 15 or 20 minutes, but I've told everyone who is presenting tonight, that if more time is needed, this will be the priority. We can either extend our evening tonight, or we can reschedule our gathering for the near future to discuss faith formation. It will not be productive, this evening, to focus on faith formation if there are significant, unresolved issues hanging in the air.

If we are able to complete our agenda tonight, the plan is for Deacon Marty Eisert, pastoral planning chair, to give us some insights into faith formation and intentional discipleship.

Then, Michele Smith, administrator of religious education at St. Callistus in Kane, will briefly refresh our memory on the six recommendations for Faith Formation introduced last year. Next, she will

present what we're calling the four pillars of encounter that we plan to unveil for parishes regarding faith formation. We'll be asking parishes to focus on one aspect in each of the next four years.

After a break, we will have the opportunity to hear from Deacon Steve Washek, our new executive director of faith formation. He will give us insight into his background and the hopes he has regarding his new responsibilities.

Deacon Steve then will talk about a project for parishes in preparation for some events we have planned early next year.

So that's our agenda. We'll see what the Holy Spirit has in mind.

Let me begin by saying this is a unique moment in the history of our church, worldwide. I've spent a lot of time and effort sharing my thoughts in statements and letters. If you've missed them, you can find a link to all of them on our homepage.

My main message has been my deep, personal sorrow. If you have read any of the experiences of victims in the grand jury report, you've had to come to terms with a reality we never could have imagined.

We must not be afraid to face our past. The more we understand it, then the more steps we can take to provide healing. And I don't just mean healing for abuse survivors, who of course need our care and support. All of us have been affected at a very deep level, albeit in different ways.

I know you're aware that we've been making very serious progress concerning sexual abuse in the church for decades, most especially since the American bishops established strong regulations in 2002.

We cannot eradicate sexual abuse in society, or even in the church. But there is always room for improvement in how we handle it. And I can assure you, we will never in my time, repeat the mistakes of the past.

Those who live in the Erie area have seen a considerable amount of media coverage about the diocese and its response to the grand jury. Occasionally, people from outside the area have indicated it seems as though the diocese has done nothing since the report was released.

I want you to know our response to the report has consumed the better part of my time and attention the last two years, and with the announcement that the dioceses of Pennsylvania are now being investigated by a federal grand jury as well, it's clear that will continue for the foreseeable future.

I won't overload you with the details, but revising our *Policy for the Protection of Children* was a very costly but significant and important undertaking.

I have done my best to be available to media locally, regionally, nationally and in some cases, even internationally. A German magazine and a French television network came to Erie for interviews.

We tried to prepare people on the front lines before the report was released: pastors, parish staff, schools and agencies. We knew they would be receiving calls and questions.

I've written letters directly to clergy and to parishioners, which I asked pastors to read from the pulpit.

And of course, the report and our own invitation for victims to come forward has empowered many to find their voice and take that important step.

This has involved having people ready to accompany them, providing support and counseling as they continue on the road to healing.

I am grateful for the many people across our diocese who quietly and privately took part in our day of prayer on the memorial of Our Mother of Sorrows, and I know many of you are responding to the Holy Father's call to pray the rosary and St. Michael the Archangel's prayer throughout October.

I'm exploring other opportunities for prayer. This is a unique moment in the church, and each of us needs to be listening to what God is asking of us as we move forward.

Finally, I'm aware that some parishes have had listening sessions, and I understand those have been helpful.

You might find it helpful to know I've asked Catholic Charities to create a Pastoral Response Team. Your pastors and religious education leaders are aware of the details, but essentially, we have a network of professionals who are volunteering to work with parish or school communities that need help talking through some of the emotions or situations they are experiencing as a result of the grand jury report.

I'd now like to open the floor for questions. After Q & A:

If there are no further questions, I'd like to introduce Deacon Marty Eisert. But first, let me say, Marty, that your leadership throughout this pastoral planning process has been an enormous gift to the Diocese of Erie. We are grateful for your administrative skills and your tireless work. But

more importantly, for your sensitivity to what you call the Holy Spirit moments.

Your approach has helped us all to move forward with confidence and I want to publicly acknowledge your work. Thank you, Deacon Marty.