



DIOCESE OF BUFFALO
Office of the Bishop

February 28, 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In recent days, you may have read news accounts of the ongoing process of the Diocese's Chapter 11 reorganization. Although the Diocese cooperated with the reporters and provided details relative to what has been asserted in several *Buffalo News* stories, very little of the information or perspective we provided was included. I wish to share with you some additional detail and context, knowing that this latest focus has likely given rise to questions and concerns about the Diocese's full commitment to resolving the many Child Victim Act claims in a fair, equitable and timely manner.

Contrary to the reporting, the Diocese is not engaged in delay tactics in order to "drag out" the process in the hope of somehow wearing down the victim-survivors and forcing them to accept an unfairly low settlement. The primary reason that the Diocese entered Chapter 11 reorganization just over three years ago was to ensure that the Diocese's limited financial resources could be put toward a settlement for all survivors of abuse. At that time, there were already hundreds of lawsuits pending against the Diocese. We now know that nearly 900 survivors have come forward to assert claims against the Diocese. The rules of Chapter 11 help to ensure that all survivors will be treated fairly. If the Diocese had not pursued reorganization in bankruptcy, there was every likelihood that judgments in favor of early litigants would have completely depleted the Diocese's limited resources, leaving the Diocese without the ability to provide financial restitution to the vast majority of other survivors.

Unfortunately, the Diocese's entry into chapter 11 coincided with the beginnings of Covid-19 lockdowns, which unavoidably delayed progress early in the case. For some time now however, we have been actively engaged in good faith negotiations with both the Creditors' Committee representing survivors' interests, as well as the Diocese's insurance carriers, in an attempt to assemble a settlement fund that will provide as much justice to survivors as possible, while also ensuring that the Diocese can continue to carry out its mission. The Diocese recognizes that no amount of money can undo the harm survivors have suffered. Moreover, it is unlikely that the Diocese could ever gather sufficient assets (even with the benefit of insurance contributions) to fully satisfy survivors' expectations and demands. Nevertheless, the Diocese remains optimistic that it will ultimately be able to bring the Creditors' Committee and its insurers together to agree upon a settlement that provides fair compensation for all survivors, and is doing everything in its power to achieve that result as quickly as possible.

I also feel it necessary to refute the assertion that the Diocese is improperly withholding abuse-related documents and other information. The Diocese has produced voluminous records to the Creditors' Committee and other appropriate parties in its Chapter 11 case, as well as to the New



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York Attorney General. We are aware of no outstanding requests from any of those parties for additional records relating to acknowledged perpetrators or the Diocese's handling of reports of abuse. Due to the sensitive nature of these records however, including the need to protect the identities of survivors, it would not be appropriate to make them available to the general public. That said, no individual within the employment of this Diocese who has been credibly accused of abuse will ever be shielded.

Since arriving as bishop of this Diocese in January, 2021, I have made clear that my highest priority is to work toward the healing of victim-survivors of abuse. At the same time, I realize that there is little I can say to ease the pain caused by the unconscionable crimes they suffered or explain how these heinous acts were allowed to happen. Ultimately, it is in what we do - far more than what we say - that will demonstrate to survivors and all of our communities that the failures of the past cannot be repeated. It is why we have put in place [rigorous policies and protocols](#) not only to ensure that young people and other vulnerable individuals are safe, but to allow us to measure and to account for the effectiveness of our approach to legal authorities and to the community at large. As I have stated repeatedly, there is zero tolerance for any act of abuse by a bishop, priest, deacon, diocesan employee or volunteer within the Diocese of Buffalo. Moreover, we require all who minister and work in the Diocese to conduct themselves and their interactions at all times in a professional manner and in keeping with the requirements of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I am deeply grateful to all who continue to remain faithful throughout our parishes and who daily fulfill the many vital ministries that provide essential care for those in need, education for our youth, comfort to the afflicted and support for our elderly, hope for those who need it most. I recognize that this painful saga that threatens to obscure the good and holy work that the Church accomplishes each and every day on behalf of so many has tested your patience and perseverance. I plead with you to abide with us as we work toward bringing about true and lasting renewal of this Diocese and, most especially, some sense of reconciliation and healing for those who have suffered so greatly at the hands of individuals who betrayed their trust and violated their oath to God.

Let us not be afraid, nor lose hope in the One who offers us the only chance for forgiveness, healing and the possibility to make all things new.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Michael W. Fisher
Bishop of Buffalo