

Like many of my brother bishops, I have spent much of these past weeks and months listening to the laity, clergy and religious of my diocese. They face a crisis of identity and question the fundamentals on which they have based their faith. They are hurting and angry and they want change. And they rightly demand it yesterday. They want greater transparency, greater lay involvement—especially of women, and they want bishops to be held accountable the same way we hold others in ministry accountable. They are sick of hearing “child sexual abuse” and the name of their Church uttered in the same breath and they can’t fathom how and why we are still struggling to rid the Church of the crime and sin of abuse that we have now been confronting conspicuously for some two decades.

In 2002, some of the faithful left, while others gave us the opportunity to create a robust and transparent approach to eradicating sexual abuse from the life of the Church. Most of us thought that what we put in place at that time was appropriate and sufficient. Then came the summer of 2018, the events of which have caused many to understandably ask if the Church is systemically flawed, if it’s irreparably damaged and if it’s even possible to save. They question if it’s possible that we still do not “get it.”

Believing in the inherent goodness of Christ’s Church, we came together this week to try and fix what’s broken and to humbly place ourselves in the center of necessary reform. Representing the Church in Baltimore and with the pain and suffering of abuse survivors ever present on my mind and in my heart, I affirm the measures on which we were prepared to vote and strongly advocate for a strict code of conduct to which we bishops must be held, and I further advocate for an independent body to which allegations against bishops can be reported. I wish this for the Church in the United States and for the Church in Baltimore and I pray these measures will give our people greater confidence that their Church is being led toward goodness and holiness by individuals who are, in fact, good and holy. This is an essential step to reminding our people that the Church is not any one priest and it’s not any one bishop. The Church is Jesus, the Body of Christ. The Church is the One whose love and grace flows forth through those who believe in Him to bring light to the world. In this period of true crisis, may we have the courage to let His light pierce the prevailing darkness and shine through.