



ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF REGINA OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

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Open letter to all those who have been wounded by the effects of clergy sexual abuse within the Archdiocese of Regina:

This letter is to all of you who have been wounded through clergy sexual abuse: to those whose abuse was at the hands of a parish priest, a pastor, a member of a religious community; and to those who were abused at what was then known as an Indian residential school. It is addressed to those of you who have left the church, those who have been cast aside, those who have found a home in another faith community or spiritual tradition, and those who remain in the Catholic Church.

Over the past two years I have had the opportunity to meet with some of you who were hurt deeply by the church, and have learned of the tragic legacy of clergy sexual abuse in our Archdiocese. I have also heard from victims who had come forward, had not been welcomed by church leaders, and who were left to experience more shame, guilt, and a door closed to healing. Many have chosen not to relate their experience to anyone and have buried their secret deep within them.

To each of you, and to all the people of the Archdiocese, this letter is an invitation to a healing journey, a journey that needs to involve the entire church. To those of you no longer in the church, but whose healing is bound up with the church's healing, and indeed to each victim wherever you are on the path to healing, we extend an offer to accompany you on this journey in ways that are helpful to you. At the outset, I want to express on behalf of the church how deeply sorry we are that you have been wounded in this way. That should never have happened to you.

It is our hope and desire to be able to walk with you, the victim. To do so, we need to begin by being honest about what happened to you, what you suffered, the gravity of what was done to you, and the further suffering you experienced when the church's response to you was not welcoming or compassionate.

As members of the one human family, we are all connected; what happens to one person impacts others. Christian faith speaks of a deeper relationship still, which holds us to an even higher standard. St. Paul tells us that when one member of the body suffers, all suffer; when one person is wounded, all are wounded. But you who have been abused have not experienced that solidarity, and these words may themselves be a source of pain and frustration. All of us, in our parishes and in church leadership, are deeply connected. All of us share this shame. It is not enough to identify those who abused and those who dealt irresponsibly or poorly with that abuse. All of us are called to repentance and to the work of healing.

Your wounds, so painful and so slow to heal, point to our wounds of contradiction and unfaithfulness. As a community of faith, we were called to bring you into a place of light, but instead you were brought into a place of darkness. Members of the clergy, who were called to affirm your worth and dignity as a beloved child of God, eroded that dignity. Bishops, members of the clergy, and the entire church, have the responsibility to make our churches safe places, prayerful places. Instead your vulnerability was exploited. When families of victims called us to take action, we reacted defensively, protecting the clergy and showing greater concern for the church's public image than for you, who by our action and inaction were marginalized and silenced. Your pain was often intensified by not being acknowledged, by being hidden and swept away, as we tried to protect the reputation of the church.

How far we have strayed from the heart of our faith, from our God who in Jesus was himself victimized. He calls us from the cross to walk with victims, to serve those who are wounded and to spend ourselves in striving to bring healing and compassion. How badly are we ourselves in need of the conversion to which we call others.

Today, Ash Wednesday, on behalf of all of the people of this Archdiocese, I turn to you, victims of clergy sexual abuse, to express our lament and great regret for what we have done to you. For the abuse you suffered, the brutal experience you were forced to endure when still in your childhood or adolescence, we are sincerely and profoundly sorry. For the shame, confusion and guilt you experienced then and in the years since the acts of abuse, we are sorry.

For the times when the church has slammed the door on you, not wanting to hear your painful truth, not wanting to face the scourge of abuse, we are sorry. For our failures in acknowledging our transgressions, for collusion in covering up what happened and for silencing victims, we are sorry. For our misuse of power, and for the clericalism which helped to create a context wherein abuse was allowed to happen and be covered up, we are sorry.

We also want to acknowledge those victims who are no longer with us - for whom this letter has come too late. To friends and family members, we are profoundly sorry for any part we played in their pain, despair and loss of hope.

To those of you whose abuse took place in the Catholic administered residential schools in the Archdiocese, we express our great sorrow at what was done to you. The abuse you suffered was linked to racism, and was often combined with a disrespect for your culture, language and spirituality. The Truth and Reconciliation process has helped to bring to light the waves of suffering which you experienced. While we as church are seeking in other contexts to address the negative aftermath of residential schools, the generational trauma, and effects of colonization, in this letter we address in a specific way those who were victims of clergy sexual abuse. As with those victimized in other contexts, you suffered because of a distorted use of power. Instead of authority being at the service of building up, teaching, giving dignity, it was used in a way which assaulted your very being. We are profoundly sorry for what happened to you, and stand before the Creator asking that we might now find a way to take steps of healing and reconciliation.

Apologizing is not enough. It is only a starting point. We want to make our apology real by making changes which prevent others from being abused and by taking steps so that your encounters with the church today are experiences of healing and compassion. We have a long journey ahead.

We commit ourselves to put the necessary structures in place so that you can safely come forward and tell your story. We commit ourselves to walk with you and accompany you in ways that you find helpful, prioritizing your needs and your healing. We have learned much from victims, and commit ourselves to continue to listen to you, and to seek your guidance as we revise our safe environment protocol and create policies and take initiatives at the service of greater accountability and transparency. We commit ourselves to a far-reaching strategy for educating and forming all ministers, organizations and parishes in the archdiocese, so that the church might be a place where children, youth and vulnerable people are safe, valued, and welcomed, and where we respond quickly and effectively when challenges arise. We will continue to host services for victims of clergy sexual abuse in our parishes, and to open our doors to victims whenever they come forward. We are establishing a lay review board to address any new allegation brought forward, will offer support when victims make the decision to go to the police, and will partner with others who can assist victims on a path of healing. We will invite our parishes and people to look for ways to listen to you, to walk with you, and to embrace the challenge of dealing honestly and faithfully with our past failures, as we strive by God's grace to do our part in building a church that is a safe, welcoming and life-giving place for all.

In conclusion, I want to express my profound gratitude to the victims who have helped to discern what needed to be said in this letter, and who have been guides in leading the church as we learn to walk with other victims. We value deeply the insights that you have shared, and have come to know that listening to victims is crucial at each step of the way. We want all victims, those outside the church and those within, to know that we recognize your suffering, your courage and the deep betrayal of your trust. Moving forward, we promise to be open to hearing your truth.

Jesus told his disciples that what is in the dark must be brought into the light, and that the truth will set us free. I would ask the people of the Archdiocese to join me, drawing on all the resources, grace and strength which our merciful God gives us, in accompanying victims on this journey of healing. May we reach out to all that have been deeply scarred, be present to those carrying the darkness of clergy sexual abuse, and sow seeds of new life. May the community of disciples who find life in him follow him more faithfully, that we may be a source of healing, hope, and blessing for those whom we have wounded, and for the world in which we live.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Donald Bolen", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first name.

✠ Donald Bolen
Archbishop of Regina

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