September 26, 2018

Dear Members of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians,

Your President, Steve Petrunak and I thought it might be a timely moment in the life of the Church to write you, our members. While those of us who are bishops might well be expected to be the ones feeling the heat given the recent scandalous revelations regarding some of our own, nonetheless it is important to acknowledge that every member of the Church and anyone involved in a leadership role within the Church is presently also feeling a good deal of discomfort. Furthermore, you are often the ones who hear the anger and confusion of many who see you as representatives of the Church.

In one sense this is not a role you signed up for when you offered to place your talents at the service of the Church. Your intention was to play and to sing and to bring people together to make beautiful music for the glory of God and the inspiration of God’s people. Besides the fact that helping people with their personal crises in faith or to resolve for them their disillusionment toward the Church was not in the job description, you may also feel ill-prepared to respond to the difficulties people raise.

I would like you to know that I can empathize with the situation in which you find yourself. Speaking as a bishop I want to offer you my apology for the position in which we in the ranks of the ordained have placed you. This awareness adds to my shame and sorrow for those who came to the Church seeking help in their encounter with God and who were so callously betrayed by the ones who had been called to serve them. They deserve the assistance and prayers of all of us in the Church. We are also faced with the recognition that more than a few leaders in the Church failed to respond to situations in which abuse took place in a manner that revealed a Christ-like concern for the person who was victimized. Instead they chose to try to protect the abuser and the institution and, in this way, added greatly to the harm already done.

I am aware that no brief letter will be of any adequate assistance to you in responding to this crisis in the life of the Church. What I would like to do is to offer very briefly a few thoughts on how you in your positions might assist the people you serve.

1. Avoid saying anything that could seem to diminish the seriousness of these revelations. We as a Church, especially those who are leaders, need to own the crimes that took place both in the abuse and the cover-up.
2. Listen patiently and don’t feel you need to provide solutions to people’s anger and their grief.
3. After listening, point them to the One who alone is trustworthy, the One who alone is our Savior and the Hope of the Church. Help them to see that it is in this same Church, the Body of Christ, so wounded in her members, where Jesus has chosen to dwell. Jesus is still present in Word and Sacrament and in the many amazing signs of holiness in her members.
4. Do what you do best: Sing and make music to the Lord! The members of the Church have always expressed the full breadth of her life through her music. We can still “Sing of the Lord’s goodness” and also cry out in song, “Have mercy on us Lord, for we have sinned.”

I am convinced that you, brothers and sisters of NPM, are a big part of the answer of the Church to her present crisis. Your gift of music is needed now more than ever in the midst of our life as a Church. You will help us to rediscover what many perhaps thought had been lost; the voice of Christ, whose voice always rises in harmony with ours when we, frail and sinful instruments though we are, sing God’s praise.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Mark J. Seitz

Most Reverend Mark J. Seitz