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May 26, 2016

My Dear Christ's Faithful of the Diocese of Crookston,

As you may know, the Minnesota Legislature passed the Minnesota Child Victims Act in May of 2013. This legislation, lifted the statute of limitations on abuse cases and opened a three-year window allowing victims an opportunity to file civil claims. Under this new law, the deadline for filing claims was May 25, 2016. As a result, fourteen new claims came forward alleging sexual abuse of a minor by a priest. One of the claims is against a priest in active ministry which is currently under investigation. The Diocese of Crookston and eight of our parishes are being sued. Thirteen of these cases cover a period between 1948 and 1991. The cases involve five priests, three of the Diocese of Crookston and two priests not of the Diocese of Crookston who had served here. All but one are deceased. In each of these cases, the parish in which the priest served and the Diocese of Crookston is being accused of negligence and neglect in allowing the priest to minister because the diocese and the parish "should have known" that the priest would abuse.

How are we addressing this situation? Our attorneys are working with our insurers to see that these civil suits are fairly resolved. We are hopeful that these suits will not affect the day to day operations of our diocese and parishes. This I know: the work and mission of the Church here will go on.

We are truly sorry that anyone, ever, anywhere, would be sexually abused. We the Church are sorry that any priest could injure a child in such a horrendous manner. We are committed to and we continue to work hard at ensuring a safe environment for all people, especially the young and the vulnerable. The healing and support of victims remains a priority for us and we encourage all who have been abused to come forward and report the abuse. Please join me in praying for the spiritual and emotional well-being of all victims of sexual abuse.

Having moved through this difficult three year window, we know, nonetheless, that the window God holds open for us today and for our future remains bright. "Behold, I am with you always; yes, even to the end of time" (Mt. 28:20). The Risen Lord Jesus never leaves his Church. The Holy Spirit continues to shower his gifts on clergy, religious and lay faithful, gifts for building up the Body of Christ and gifts we use in bringing the Good News of salvation in Christ Jesus to our world. The Church remains the primary means through which Christ accomplishes God's merciful and redemptive will for the world. Especially through the Eucharist and the sacraments, administered to us through the ministry of priests, the love and mercy of God continue to flow to us. We thank God for the vast majority of priests who have served so well in this local church and for those who serve us well today. Thank your priests and continue to pray for them. Continue to pray too, I ask, that the Good Lord will bless us with an abundance of priestly vocations.

Sincerely, in the Name of the Lord Jesus,

Most Rev. Michael J. Hoeppner
Bishop of Crookston