



BISHOP EDWARD B. SCHARFENBERGER

OFFICE of the BISHOP

August 4, 2022

Feast of St. Jean Vianney, the Curé of Ars

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

One of the most frequent things I hear from survivors of sexual abuse is a fear they will not be taken seriously. Who do I tell? Where do I go? Who will believe me? Underlying this fear is often, sadly, a notion that they were somehow responsible for their abuser's behavior. As difficult as this may seem to those who have not walked in their shoes, it is commonplace. It happens also to people suffering from domestic violence. The first truth that must be told to every survivor is: you are not the cause, you are not alone, and you are not responsible for what happened to you. You are, however, responsible for what happens now: the beginning of the process of healing. This takes great courage but, as God's people, we know the Christ-like thing to do is to accompany, to "walk with" the survivor.

I use the word "survivor," not "victim." Why? Because an essential step in the process towards recovery is to stand tall, without shame and fear, and to refuse forever to be branded a victim, one defined only by what happened to them. This is not how God sees us. God loves us, no matter what has happened to us. Jesus meets us where we are. That is why we meet the survivor wherever he or she is.

Some survivors may find the courage and confidence to come forward, perhaps to meet with our Assistance Coordinator, with me personally, or with an attorney, if they have sought the legal remedies offered by the Child Victims Act (CVA). Some may even, as one survivor did recently, come forward on the steps of the church where he or she first met their abuser and speak very publicly. Others may prefer the confidentiality or even anonymity of private conversation. Not all persons heal in the same way, but the door is open to walk at the pace in which each is most comfortable.

What most concerns me, however, are those who suffer in silence. The many survivors – as much as 85% we are told – who suffered abuse in circles, often as close as the family home, that will not have the help of an advocate in court or the compassion of a loving community. Sad to say, there are those, even in our own parishes, who see survivors as a nuisance, forgetting that they are our parents, our brothers and sisters, our children and neighbors, all children of God. Yet it is necessary that they come forward, even if it means identifying an abuser, living or deceased, who was known as "father" or some other title of honor and abused that trust to violate an innocent person who, like others, trusted him or her.

I ask every parish to share this letter with your congregation. I also enclose some petitions that may be used, in rotating order perhaps, at the General Intercessions or the weekly bulletin, to remember to keep praying for our survivors, their friends and families, and for us all as we seek to encourage them not to be afraid to step forward, seek assistance, tell their story and, most of all, accept being accepted as our children, our brothers and sisters, embraced by a loving God of mercy who sent his Son – and it was his only child! – to suffer and die for each of us, even if we were the only person in the world!

God bless you all,

+Edward B. Scharfenberger
Bishop of Albany

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