



ST. AUSTIN CATHOLIC PARISH

Served by the Paulist Fathers

An open letter from Fr. Chuck Kullmann, CSP, Pastor

I write to you, my fellow St. Austin parishioners, at a time of agony, specifically the horrific revelation about clergy sexual abuse in Pennsylvania over the last 60 to 70 years. There are two parts to this tragedy: the actual crimes against children, some of it of the most vile and depraved sort, and the decades long cover-up of those crimes by the Church hierarchy which permitted the abuse to continue and ensnare further victims.

While an intense emotional revulsion is wholly appropriate to both of these horrors, it is not enough to remain only in an emotional reaction. We all need to be much better at recognizing the signs of abuse-sexual, emotional, physical-and know how to respond appropriately and inform the proper authorities.

Our children at St. Austin Catholic School and in our Faith Formation program receive such training. There is also, of course, training for teachers and catechists. Since I am not an expert in this field, I cannot certify the quality of such training, but it is certainly a start.

In the [parish bulletin for July 29](#), I wrote about the importance of the Diocese of Austin Ethics and Integrity in Ministry (EIM) training for all volunteers in the parish, and I again urge all adults in the parish to experience this program. I have found it informative and helpful. Please visit the Diocesan EIM website and our EIM page at www.staustin.org/eim for details. If you have questions, you may contact our parish EIM coordinator, Sharon Jones, at sjones@staustin.org or 512-477-9471 ext. 303.

That is good as far as it goes, but we still have to deal with the cover up, which is a more involved and difficult situation. Bishops and pastors have, due to the complexity of modern life, become consumed by issues of administration. In the process, many have ceased being shepherds and in effect become bureaucrats and administrators. I remember one Archbishop in another diocese where I was stationed, whom I had invited to assist at a Lenten Penance Service, telling me that even though he is the chief liturgical officer of the diocese, he seldom had the opportunity to hear confessions (celebrate Reconciliation) because of the press of administrative duties. That is not good.

A good shepherd will protect the sheep. An administrator will protect the institution, which is exactly what Bishops and pastors did in covering up this abuse. It was wrong. We need shepherds who know, love, and protect the sheep, i.e., the people entrusted to their care.

We need to pray for Bishops and pastors that they will be Good Shepherds. But that is not enough. We also need to be noisy sheep who will both make known our needs and support Bishops to be shepherds and not bureaucrats.

Moving forward, I encourage you to plan to attend a [parish mission here at St. Austin on October 22-24](#). It will be conducted by Paulist Father Steven Bell, former associate pastor here. The theme of the mission will focus on healing. I think it will be personally helpful to many.

The St. Austin Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) will discuss the issue of the clergy sexual abuse and coverup and consider how we can most appropriately respond as a parish. We will do this at our Parish Council retreat on Sat., Sept. 8. If you have suggestions or ideas about what we could do as a parish in response to this tragedy, and how we can better support one another through this tragedy, I encourage you to pass those ideas on to me via email at ckullmann@staustin.org or to one of the [PPC members](#) before Sept. 8.

It will not be enough simply to put this horror behind us. We must learn from it to better protect our children, vulnerable adults, elderly and infirm, and indeed ourselves. In doing so we will protect and enhance the Church we love. With the guidance and wisdom and strength provided by the Holy Spirit, we will do it.

God bless!

Fr. Chuck