

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

September 13, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Many of you have awakened this morning to read an article in the Syracuse Newspapers stating that I blame victims for being sexually abused. Allow me to be clear: I in no way believe a child is responsible for being abused by any person. I also believe and have clearly stated that a priest who abuses a child is wrong as is any adult who takes advantage and harms a child.

The article cites passages from a deposition in 2011. I tried my best to answer questions and I must admit gave responses that I wish were different. It saddens me to read the article and to realize that my words give the wrongful impression to victims, their families and the people of the diocese that I believe victims of abuse are at fault. There is nothing further from the truth. Victims of abuse are never at fault!

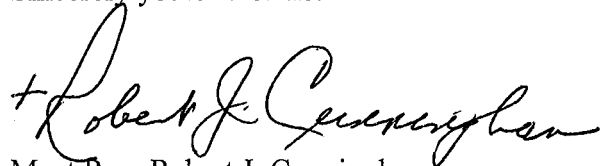
The plain and simple fact is that depositions are difficult by their very nature. The line of questioning varied between specific and generic scenarios concerning the Sacrament of Confession. I was trying to explain that in general I do not know what is on the minds and hearts of individuals and failed to state clearly what I believe, particularly as it pertained to the case at hand. It is obvious that my choice of words should have been better. Bottom line is, I cannot go back and change my words but I can assure you that I did not believe the individual involved in the case was at fault. I clearly stated the priest was at fault. No child is responsible for being abused. A priest or any other adult who abuses a child is wrong.

Child sexual abuse in the Church is painful for all of us. It never should have a place in our Church. However, we have and are continuing to address this issue with fervor. We are committed to ensuring that child sexual abuse does not happen in the Catholic Church and that all children remain safe. Since 2002, we have established a Diocesan Review Board made up of professionals who bring their skill set to assist in determining credibility of old allegations. Our diocesan policy mandates that all clergy, religious, employees and those volunteers whose ministry puts them in the presence of children complete a criminal background check and child and youth protection training. We also have an Office of Victim Assistance which serves as the point of contact for those who feel they have been harmed and serves as a liaison to assist in providing support for spiritual and emotional healing. It bears repeating from my other letters that there is no member of the clergy serving in the diocese who has a credible allegation of child sexual abuse.

I am aware that there are those who do not agree with decisions that I have made and those who will take these words as truth and those who will not. It is a painful reality but one I cannot change.

As your Bishop, you have my commitment that I will continue to do all I can to safeguard our children. I will continue to pray for the healing of those who have been harmed. May God continue to guide us through these difficult times and strengthen me to be the good shepherd you deserve in the Diocese of Syracuse.

Sincerely yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert J. Cunningham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Robert J. Cunningham

Bishop of Syracuse