



*He willed to give us birth by the word of truth
that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

James 1:18

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

I have spoken often with you about the gift of our life from God and our desire to be in relationship with God, Who seeks us always to be in communion with Him. It is our communion with God which bears firstfruits; Jesus is the firstfruit of a new creation and we become the firstfruits of His abundant harvest through the Sacrament of Baptism.

The abundant harvest continues to thrive only if we live by the Word of Truth. The Church is holy because of the goodness of so many, laity, religious and clergy, who seek daily to live by the Word of Truth. St. James reminds us that the Father of lights grants us all good giving and every perfect gift and in Him there is no alteration or shadow.

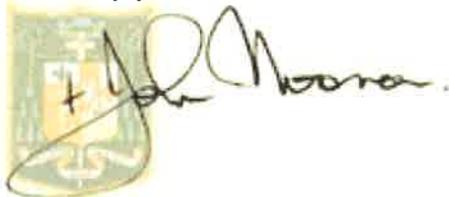
During these past few weeks, my heart is pained with sadness and I, like you, am overwhelmed at the shadow cast by the information about sexual misconduct within the Church. It is horrifying and difficult to understand how these consecrated men left the Word of Truth so many years ago.

Some of you have asked for assurances that we are vigilant in keeping our families safe from harm. It is everyone's responsibility to safeguard those around us. In 1995, the Diocese of Orlando created a Diocesan Lay Review Board to provide oversight to policy creation and review situations involving allegations of sexual misconduct. Our policies are reviewed annually and updated when appropriate as we manage technology and changes. In 1997, the Diocese of Orlando began a safe environment training and fingerprint program for clergy, religious, lay staff and soon after expanded it to include volunteers who serve vulnerable populations. There is comprehensive screening of seminarians. Our policy dictates that when we are informed of an allegation of abuse, we report the information to law enforcement and we have published the abuse hotline number to our staff, volunteers, and parishioners. When a priest is removed from ministry, public notification is made to our parishes and schools. The Diocesan victim assistance coordinator seeks to assist the victim in healing. We ask those who have been harmed to take courage and come forward because we will listen. Our children in our Catholic schools and faith formation programs learn about what it means to be a child of God and the dignity offered to each one because of their holy essence. The Diocese of Orlando participates willingly in an annual audit of safe environment practices and has received audit approval each year since the audits have been offered.

This list exemplifies how we tend to the brokenhearted and nurture the children of God. It cannot articulate the profound care offered by so many through the years to create the opportunity for a safe environment. I am grateful to each one of you for being a part of the community of faith enfolding our vulnerable people with the tenderness of Jesus, our Good Shepherd. Since I came to serve you as bishop, with your help, we are doing our best to safeguard this community of faith within the nine counties of the Diocese of Orlando.

Jesus said, "From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile." Pray with me that we humbly welcome the Word that has been planted in us and is able to save our souls.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Noonan", is written over a circular seal. The seal is partially obscured by the signature and contains a cross and other symbols.

Most Reverend John Noonan
Bishop of Orlando