

# THE BALTIMORE SUN

## **Episcopal priest: Archdiocese of Baltimore must be held accountable, morally and legally, for child sexual abuse**

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My husband and I are both Episcopal priests. While wearing a clerical collar, he has often been insulted by strangers, called a “pedophile”, “child-molester” and worse. Why? Because people assumed he was a Catholic priest. This is beyond heartbreaking to him and to me, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse by our family pediatrician as a girl in my native New York.

We both deeply love the Church, not just the Episcopal Church, but the Church as a whole. Jesus called the Church to be a light to the nations and a vision of the Kingdom of Heaven. By extension, we believe that when the Church, by the actions of those in direct control, acts against the will of God by abusing children, it needs to be called into account, both morally and legally.

On Sept. 29, 2023, Archbishop William E. Lori, of the Archdiocese of Baltimore (AOB), disclosed the filing of bankruptcy just after survivors of AOB clergy abuse announced that on Oct. 1st they’d be suing the church under a new state survivors’ justice law, which eliminates the onerous statute of limitations and age restrictions for Maryland victims filing child sexual abuse claims against individuals and enablers.

In a letter to the archdiocese, Lori wrote, “the Church cannot and will not abandon its moral responsibility to assist victims and accompany them on their journeys.” But this plan excluded all future claims of victim-survivors, estimated in the hundreds, possibly thousands. Later in his letter, the archbishop acknowledged, “If a plan is approved by the bankruptcy court, no future claims for past cases of abuse can be brought against the Church.”

Of course, the Archdiocese of Baltimore is not alone; it is the latest of over [30 dioceses](#) since 2004 to file for bankruptcy due to clergy sexual abuse claims. But while it seeks to protect its assets in federal Bankruptcy Court, Scripture should be a trusted guide to an archdiocese, including its bishops, for transparently and respectfully responding to well documented allegations of systemic abuse. They failed their sacred stewardship of protecting their flock. “A bishop, as God’s steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant ... or violent or greedy for

gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled.”

In The Ten Commandments, God prioritizes two key values: love and honor both God and neighbor. This includes not dishonoring God’s image in your neighbor. God’s primary concern was and is for the poor, defenseless and weak. And Jesus had a particular love for children, asserting: “If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.” By both scripture and church teaching, it is impossible to escape the ugly truth that abusing children or enabling that abuse by a bishop or other church leader is much more than a crime; it is a crime against the Holy Spirit. It is blasphemy.

All institutions are made up of fragile people who sometimes commit egregious, monstrous acts of violence. But the Catholic Church, by prioritizing secrecy and self-protection over protecting the people within it, creates a culture of abuse, where perpetrators can abuse freely and openly without suffering any consequences. And then rather than trying to heal the victims, they’re doubly traumatizing them. They are also causing people to leave the Church, thereby putting a stumbling block before all the people.

*The writer is a priest-survivor at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, La Porte, Indiana, and a member of the “Survivor’s Advisory Board” assembled by Maryland and Delaware personal injury law firms Jenner Law P.C.; Grant & Eisenhofer P.A.; and Baird, Mandalas, Brockstedt & Federico.*