

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,
WESTMINSTER, LONDON, SW1P 1QJ



22 August 2018

Dear Father

As a priest and bishop, I have found the last few weeks both shocking and distressing. I am sure that you will have, too.

The plain and detailed disclosure of the extent of the abuse of children which has taken place in various parts of our Church, over so many years, has been so painful to follow and to take to heart. Yet to do so is absolutely necessary.

The initial response of Pope Francis was that of 'sorrow and shame'. I fully share that response.

I am so sorry for the hurt that has been caused, primarily to those whose lives have been radically damaged by childhood abuse, to their families, and to those who know personally a deep sense of trust that has been betrayed.

I am utterly ashamed that this evil has, for so long, found a place in our house, our Church. This evil has particular abhorrence because not only is it a terrible abuse of power, but also because, in its evil, it both employs and destroys the very goodness of faith and trust in God. As a Father in this House, I bear this shame in a direct way, for it is the direct responsibility of a father to protect his household from harm, no matter how difficult and complex that might be.

On Monday, Pope Francis, our Holy Father, addressed a letter to all members of the Church. I am sure you will have read it. Please urge your people to read it, too. It is available in many places and, in its entirety, on the website of the Diocese of Westminster. The Pope's Letter begins with a quotation from St Paul: 'If one member suffers, all suffer together with it' (1 Cor. 12.26). In doing so, he reflects on the ways in which we have paid insufficient attention to the suffering of those who have been abused, and on the ways in which we have to tackle this together, starting with the renewal of holiness which comes only with prayer and penitence.

Let us read this Letter over and over again. It has so much to give us.

I share these thoughts with you as they have been constantly on my mind in these last weeks and days. Please be sure of my prayers for you. Please do share this letter, or these thoughts, with your people in the way you think best.

Let us turn to the Lord in our sorrow and shame, remembering the words of the Prophet Isaiah from Tuesday's Office of Readings: 'If you do not stand by me, you will not stand at all' (Is. 7.9).

And let us pray for the renewal of family life through the World Meeting of Families, this weekend, so that all family life may find strength and joy in standing with the Lord!

With my renewed prayers and best wishes,

Yours devotedly

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vincent Nichols". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster