



29 November 2018

Statement of the Secretary General  
Religious Communities and the Sexual Abuse of Children

To All Who Have Held a Child in Love, with Joy for Its Life, with Tears for Its Pain:

In an unspeakable perversion of innocence, children are suffering sexual abuse within religious communities by some of the very religious leaders commissioned to teach them trust. This assault on their childhood is intolerable, our failure to respond a betrayal, our silence complicity.

The sexual abuse of children within religious communities is a grave crime, and as a crime, must be prosecuted to the full extent of just laws designed to protect children. Covering up such a crime by religious authorities is a form of complicity, and that, too, must be addressed by all relevant laws.

In addition to the due reach of the law, diverse religious communities must heed the summons of their own highest moral standards. A shared moral force of religious traditions is the recognition that the "admission of fault," "repentance," "good faith attempts for restitution" and the "search for reconciliation" are the proper responses for failures of all sorts, including the grievous breaches of trust and abuses of power intrinsic to childhood sexual abuse.

Religious believers need to be the first to hold their own communities and leaders accountable both to the law and to their traditions' highest religious standards. Collectively, all religious communities need to work together to help build the culture of honesty and transparency essential for the protection of children and for advancing the sanctity and promise of the child.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William F. Verselky".

Dr. William Vendley  
Secretary General