



## ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

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We, both as an association and as individual members of the Catholic community, are increasingly disheartened at the revelation of the decades-long sexual abuse within the Catholic Church. With each passing day, we learn anew how minors and vulnerable adults were sexually harmed by clergy and, to make matters worse, how ecclesiastical leadership failed to protect them. In some instances, complacency was chosen; in others, dishonesty and deceit. This widespread evil has resulted in a crisis of faith in the moral leadership of our Church, fruit of a culture of silence that both allowed and perpetuated the abuse. Now more than ever, it is time for courageous leadership to emerge.

The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities stands in solidarity with the thousands of victims and acknowledges with them the irreparable nature of the harm done. We are heartbroken by the atrocities committed by clerics and consecrated persons against those entrusted to their pastoral care. Criminal acts were committed by predatory leaders, most often in parishes. Clericalism enabled complicity and cover up. Like many believers, we feel a deep sense of betrayal. And still, this betrayal is but a fraction of the pain endured by the victims. Now more than ever, it is time to take responsibility and advance reform.

We press upon Church leaders to include expert members of the laity, especially women, more fully in the work of reformation to eradicate abuse. Reform must include independent oversight that will address the systemic cover-up that lies at the heart of this present crisis. Notwithstanding the advances that have been made in recent years to put in place some helpful practices, we call upon Church officials to reexamine the exploitative culture and practices that failed to protect God's people, and the hierarchy that allowed criminal offenders to go unpunished. Taking a cue from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-racial South Africa, we seek full transparency and restorative justice acknowledging the grave sins and hurt to victims. Now more than ever, it is time to call upon the commitment and life experience of the laity to assist in the transparency and reformation process.

Embracing the Catholic Social Tradition of our member colleges and universities, we cherish and uphold the dignity of every human being. We are Catholic educators charged with the monumental task of maintaining the Catholic identity of our institutions in a multifaith environment, guiding students to live out the values central to Christ's teachings. Now more than ever, we recommit our institutions to safeguard the sanctity of every human person.

We believe that our Church stands at a crossroads. Empowered by our commitment to Christ Jesus, we embrace our identity as cooperative co-creators with God. We affirm the fact that in the Church there is a diversity of ministry and a oneness of mission. In accordance with that mission, the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities pledges to help in any way we can. Now more than ever, we stand ready to use our talents to revisit policies to reform Church structures and find ways to redress victims, past and present.

**August 31, 2018**