

19 August 2018

Dear JST Community,

In recent weeks, the Catholic Church in the United States has again reckoned with the scourge of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults. Revelations of systematic abuse of authority by individual priests and by bishops have stirred a variety of emotions within us and those we serve: anger, sadness, compassion for the victims and their families, disgust, disillusionment, and frustration, to name a few.

The mass resignations of Chilean bishops, in the wake of revelations of abuse and cover-up in that country, remind us that the scandal, crime, and sin of sexual abuse is not an American problem alone. We brace ourselves for more distressing news from dioceses around the world.

In this precarious moment, I write for two reasons.

The first is to share a recent letter by Scott Santarosa, S.J., Provincial of Jesuits West and JST alumnus and Board member. We support the Province's commitment to care for victims of sexual abuse and to hold accountable those responsible for the abuse. **Please read Father Santarosa's letter (attached here), which references important resources that the Province offers.**

The second reason I write is to ask a question to which I offer no simple answer now: ***how can we as a theology center in the Jesuit and Catholic tradition best respond to the needs of the Church at this time?***

As I reflect on the question, I consider the invaluable resources and opportunities that we have at JST. In our theological reflection and Scripture study, faculty and students can examine with intellectual rigor and spiritual depth important questions, such as: *How is authority distributed and exercised in the Church? How do we effectively contest clericalism? How do we preach the Gospel to a Church that is wounded? How can moral theology, including our tradition in Catholic social thought, deepen our understanding of the problems we now face? How do we interpret Scripture in light of sexual violence, the suffering of victims, and abuse of power? How can systematic theology and Scripture offer hope to those in despair?*

Moreover, we can rely on our ministerial formation programs to teach students about the responsible and ethical exercise of their authority. Equally important, our formation programs help students cultivate skills to accompany people impacted by abuse and disheartened by scandal and betrayal of sacred trust.

**At our annual retreat this week, the JST faculty will consider how we as scholars and teachers can best serve the people of God at this time.**

I invite you to join us in the conversation during this academic year, both inside and outside the classroom. At JST, we are committed to the culturally contextualized study of theology and Scripture. In our study, work, and prayer, we must therefore be attentive to the context of sexual abuse and abuse of authority within our Church (and also within other religious communities, families, and civic institutions). Naming the stark and painful reality of sexual abuse and abuse of power is not easy, but it is essential to the healing that is so much needed.

Our theological, biblical, and spiritual resources offer a way forward to the reform and reconciliation that we seek. In the meantime, let us pray for the victims of sexual abuse, within and outside the Church, and pray that the Spirit may guide us as we seek to be ministers of mercy in the Church that is both blessed and broken.

Sincerely, in our Lord,

Kevin O'Brien, S.J.