



## STATEMENT FROM MOST REVEREND ALFRED A. SCHLERT BISHOP OF ALLENTOWN

Every Bishop inherits the history of his Diocese. It falls to him to shoulder any failings from the past, to apologize, to ask forgiveness, to promote healing, and to do what he can to prevent recurrence.

The Grand Jury Report is a sad and humbling account of the Priesthood used for evil purposes. The victims and survivors of clergy sexual abuse have suffered terribly, and it is my sincere hope that the Report is an important step in their healing and recovery.

It was for this reason that I did nothing to block the Report or delay its release, even though I knew it would contain information that reflects negatively on me, on some of our priests and former bishops, and on the Diocese as a whole.

There are three points I would like to clarify about the Report now that it has been released:

- Treatment of victims: I have always viewed victims and survivors as sincere, dignified, and extremely courageous for coming forward. I have always treated them with respect, and I always will. For those who suggest otherwise, nothing could be further from the truth.
- Reports to law enforcement: Every priest of the Diocese of Allentown who faced an allegation of abuse was reported to law enforcement. Since I have been Bishop, I have continued to enforce a Zero Tolerance Policy, which calls for immediate removal from ministry, immediate reporting to law enforcement, and acting transparently in cooperation with law enforcement. As an example, I would refer you to a recent allegation against one of our priests. We immediately notified the Northampton County District Attorney's office and immediately removed the priest from ministry.
- Retirement of offending priests: In 2002, imposing retirement on perpetrators was the quickest and best option to get them out of ministry and to protect children. Now, there are more canonical processes to laicize, or "defrock," an offending priest which requires Vatican approval.

As your Bishop, I pledge to you that the Diocese of Allentown will always treat victims and survivors with respect; will continue to provide victims the counseling and support they need; and will continue to act transparently and quickly in the event of an allegation of abuse.