Over the last six weeks, new revelations of scandalous and even criminal activity by bishops and priests have deeply angered and shaken all of us. While this fresh moment of crisis calls us firstly to a spirit of prayer, it also demands action: both to work toward justice and healing for victims, and toward a broader commitment to renewal and change in how the Church’s leaders serve you, the People of God.

In that spirit, I wish to inform you about several initiatives that I have recently begun to undertake in the hope of responding adequately to the challenges of these days. These efforts are taking place on a number of levels:

**Input from the priests:** On Sept. 4-6, I gathered with the priests who serve in the Diocese of Burlington for our annual Presbyteral Days. Normally, the discussions and presentations are planned months in advance, as they were for this year’s gathering. However, the week before the Presbyteral Days, I met with pastors and parish administrators for a regularly scheduled “business day.” While we did deal with all the necessary administrative matters that were on the agenda, the majority of time was spent discussing the recent scandals within the Church that have been made public over the last two months. As a result of that discussion, we decided to set aside the week’s planned program at Presbyteral Days and focus exclusively on how we as a Diocese should respond prayerfully, pastorally, and administratively to the scandals.

**Input from the Laity:** Following up on this, I brought the deliberations and initial recommendations from the priests to the synod delegates on Sept. 8 at the scheduled Synod Planning Session. As you may be aware, the delegates represent one lay person from every parish or parish cluster in the Diocese (about 75 lay men and women). A number of “at large” lay delegates as well as clergy were also present. While we continued the work of preparing for the upcoming Synod, we also discussed the problems that have come to light in the recent scandals and ways to move forward, together, as a Church.

**Discussion on a national level:** On Sept. 11 and 12, I was in Washington, D.C., for a meeting of the Administrative Board of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). This was my last meeting with the board as my term as chair of the USCCB Communications Committee will end with this year’s USCCB meeting in November. The agenda for the meeting was packed, much of it with matters pertaining to the national and international scandals within the Church. While my voice was only one among the 25-30 in the room, please know I brought to the discussion what I received from my clergy and lay people over the course of the previous meetings.

I have received a number of emails and letters from many of you regarding how best to respond to this crisis. I have kept your recommendations and plan on bringing them to both the Presbyteral Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council at our next scheduled meetings.

A few weeks ago, I was away with my bishops’ support group. There are seven of us in the group (all of us ordained bishops post-2002), and we always set aside Labor Day weekend for our three-day gathering. More than any other time, we felt a real call to prayer and penance in front of the Cross. It was a clear reminder to us that we are called “to serve not to be served.” Relying on the mercy and grace that flows from Our Crucified Lord, Jesus Christ, I commit myself to all of you, doing all that I can to proclaim the “Good News” even when it is difficult to do so.

Please pray for me and your priests as I pray for you.

I will continue to communicate with you every step of the way. Thank you for your faith and support.

Yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Christopher J. Coyne
Bishop of Burlington
UPCOMING EVENTS

09/16 SUNDAY
Chicken and Biscuit Dinner
All Saints Dorian Hall, Richford • 12 pm
$10 for adults, $8 for senior citizens, $5 for children 5-10 years, free for children under 5 years.

09/16 SUNDAY
Vermont Catholic Advance Directive Presentation
Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Swanton • 2 - 4 pm
Here in Vermont, many options are available for end-of-life care. Sadly, some of these are morally very troublesome! For this reason, the Diocese of Burlington has created the Vermont Catholic Advance Directives. Join Deacon Pete Gummere for a discussion on the Vermont Catholic Advance Directives.

09/17, 24, 10/1 MONDAYS
Program: Celebrating the Faith of the Early Christians
St. John the Baptist, 9:45 - 11 am
Sacred Heart St. Francis, 7 - 8:15 pm
Sacred Heart St. Francis de Sales Parish in Bennington and St. John the Baptist Parish in North Bennington will present a program to celebrate the faith of early Christians through their catacomb art with visuals, short videos, music, early Church writings and prayer. Sacramental images related to baptism and Eucharist will be covered. Emphasis also will be placed on the assimilation and transformation of pagan motifs, the first images of Mary, and the Old and New Testament narratives that dealt with persecution, eschatology and salvation history.

09/17, 24, 10/1, 08, 15 MONDAYS
Bishop Barron’s The Mass’ series
Holy Family Parish Hall, Essex Junction • 7-8 pm
This is a six-part presentation of Bishop Robert Barron’s The Mass series. Walk through the Liturgy with Bishop Barron and you will be transformed through insights on this most privileged and intimate encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ. The series began on September 10.

09/18 WEDNESDAY
Youth Ministry 101 Training
Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, Williston • 6:30 - 8:30 pm
This foundation in Youth Ministry workshop will include an overview of the USCCB document “Renewing the Vision”, as well as basic concepts in Youth Ministry. Open to anyone seeking to improve their skills and understanding for well as basic concepts in Youth Ministry. Open to anyone.

09/20 THURSDAY
Vermont Catholic Advance Directive Presentation
St. Norbert, Hardwick • 1:30 pm & 6:30 pm
Here in Vermont, many options are available for end-of-life care. Sadly, some of these are morally very troublesome! For this reason, the Diocese of Burlington has created the Vermont Catholic Advance Directives. Join Deacon Pete Gummere for a discussion on the Vermont Catholic Advance Directives.

09/22, 23 SATURDAY & SUNDAY
Young Adult Retreat
Dumaine Retreat Center in Jacksonville • 9:30 am - 2 pm
For young adults ages 18-39. Cost is $65 and includes meals and lodging. Spiritual Director is Father Jon Schnobrich, Diocesan Vocation Director. Register Now! FOR MORE INFO: www.vermontcatholic.org/event/young-adult-retreat/

09/26 WEDNESDAY
40 Days for Life Kick-off Vigil
183 St Paul Street, Burlington • 6 - 8 pm
40 Days for Life is a very effective pro-life witness saving thousands of babies. Participants are prayerful, peaceful and respectful. We will be praying in front of Planned Parenthood from 8 am to 6 pm from Sept 26 to Nov 4. Our presence is a powerful witness. We seek to have two or more persons there at all times but cannot do it without you. Please sign up at 40DaysforLife.com/burlington.

Refreshments will be available. No fee and no pre-registration needed. 8:30 am Mass offered prior to class time. We will be doing two lessons a week for three weeks and will end on the fourth week with the bonus DVDs entitled “The Eucharist” and added bonus “Heroic Priesthood”.

09/19, 26, 10/3, 10 WEDNESDAYS
Bishop Barron’s The Mass’ series
Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Swanton • 9:30 - 10:30 am

BISHOP’S ANNUAL APPEAL

Your faith and support are especially important during this difficult time for our Church. We must continue to be the light in the darkness; to provide emergency aid to the poor, financial aid to our Catholic schools, training for our directors of religious education and Pre-Cana for our engaged couples; and to engage laity in new ways to strengthen our mission. Please consider a gift to the Bishop’s Annual Appeal and help us build a better future for us all.