



Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Office of the Archbishop
222 North 17th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1299

April 4, 2018

Brothers,

On March 26, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that “at least 250 individuals” had joined as plaintiffs in federal civil suits in Michigan against Dr. Larry Nassar, Michigan State University (MSU), USA Gymnastics, and others. MSU alone could face \$500 million in costs and penalties related to the systematic sex abuse carried out for years by Nassar, an MSU employee serving as team doctor for the U.S. Gymnastics team.

A court convicted Nassar of criminal sexual abuse and sentenced him earlier this year to 40 to 125 years in prison. The greatest tragedy in this ugly story, of course, is the *catastrophic number of his victims and their families*, all of them wounded by his actions. Nassar’s supervisors and colleagues repeatedly ignored complaints and warning signs that should have led to prompt corrective action.

The Nassar story teaches two lessons. *First*, it reconfirms the fact that sexual abuse, including the sexual abuse of minors, is a serious national problem cutting across all institutions and professions, public and private. *Second*, and even more importantly, it reminds all of us as clergy of our responsibility to report suspected abuse to civil authorities, to educate our staffs and volunteers to recognize the signs of sexual abuse and grooming behavior, and to take all steps needed to ensure the safety of the families in our parishes and students in our Catholic schools. No protective system can ever be perfect, but we need to continue our ongoing commitment to vigilance on this issue and to doing all we can to prevent abuse in the future.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Awareness month. I want to take this opportunity to alert you that on April 23, 2018, a conference for safe environment coordinators and facilitators will take place in King of Prussia. Organized and facilitated by Leslie Davila and our archdiocesan OCYP office, we expect more than 200 of our colleagues to gather for professional development and training to further ensure that we’re doing everything possible to protect our children.

Please take time this month to engage your parish leadership about the need for continuing vigilance on the issues of sexual abuse and grooming behaviors. In addition, as I shared with you during our convocation last summer, Suzanne Hueston and Fran Maier of my staff are available to assist you with briefing your parish councils and finance committees on any statute of limitation related matters -- which may become prominent again in the coming weeks. Thank you for your attention to this critical material.

Sincerely yours in the Risen Christ,

Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.
Archbishop of Philadelphia