

Spiritual direction

provides a space for noticing how our anger and pain may be inviting us to a new place. There are many religious sisters and brothers, or lay people, as well as priests, who offer spiritual direction. Retreat houses, spiritual development centers, or the diocesan Office for Spiritual Development can provide references.

How can we help?

■ **Gain perspective** by seeking out accurate information from various sources. (Excellent resources may be found at the web address provided at the end of this leaflet.)

■ **If you become aware of an abusive situation** involving professionals, church ministers, or family members, take immediate action by speaking forthrightly to the appropriate authorities.

■ **If you are the friend of someone who has been abused** or of someone who is very angry, remember that there are several things you can do. Listening to a person's hurt with acceptance and respect is important. Lift your friend up in prayer. Share how you yourself are feeling if that might be helpful. Sometimes, having a cup of coffee or going to a

movie together may be the best way to reach out. Realize that the process of grieving will take time, but let someone in need know that you're there—you are the representative of the community for them.

■ **This is an awkward time for many priests** who are dealing with their own hurt and anger. Naming any awkwardness that you might feel will help to build up trust and respect between you and the priests you know. If a priest is a friend or has been particularly helpful to you in your faith journey, send a card, e-mail, or make a call. Together, we will find support, compassion, and encouragement.

Although this is a painful and upsetting time, we can lift up our Church and our world in prayer, remembering that God is doing something in this darkness, and we can trust that it is something good.

—Madonna T. Ratliff, FSP and Kathryn J. Hermes, FSP
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For guides to prayer, a list of resources, and other suggestions, log-on to:

www.pauline.org/church



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Time of Crisis **Time of Faith**



"I can't believe this is happening to our Church!"

"I am so angry—I've trusted priests to care for my kids!"

"I don't know if I can go to church again!"

"I feel like I've been betrayed by someone I trusted."

As Catholics, we have been deeply saddened these past months. Across the country, newspaper stories of the sexual misconduct of priests and the inadequate response of Church leaders have confused, frightened, and angered many of us. If you feel angry, bewildered, anxious, you are not alone. You are feeling what many are experiencing right now. Why? Because *we* are hurting.

The present crisis is not just about "the Church we belong to." In a very real sense, it is about all of us. Saint Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth: "The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:16).

Thus, in a very real sense, all of us are deeply affected by what has happened. *Our* body is suffering right now.

Faith in crisis

A time of crisis calls us to a deeper, more mature faith. The faith-stage of childhood easily equates the Church and its ministers with the God “whom they represent.” The idea that sacred ministers can be guilty of terrible crimes can be enough to shake or completely shatter such faith.

If you feel this way, perhaps you are being invited to another faith-stage, a purified and more mature faith, one that wrestles with the ambiguities of sin and grace existing together and yet believes that God is somehow with us in the midst of indescribable pain. God is holding on to us tightly and will not let us go.

God has been with us!

In order to recognize how God is with us in our present situation, we can look back to see how he has acted in the past. We can search the Scriptures to uncover anew God’s promises.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, Isaiah preached to the exiles in Babylon,

“Now, thus says the Lord, fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you” (*Is 43:1–2*). God’s chosen people learned through their experiences and darkness that it is God who saves. God was faithful to them, even when they were not faithful to God. “I shall restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal” (*Jer 30:17*).

God sent Jesus to prove that “love is strong as death.” The cross, a symbol of the most shocking violence imaginable, became the manifestation of this love. And God’s love has not ended. It is still manifest today in situations of human anguish and sin. We can trust that God is with us even now.

We together are the Church

Knowing that God is with us, we can “remind” God to be God, to reach out to redeem us, and to show us his love once again as in the past.

We can welcome the chance to better understand what it means to *be* the People of God, the Body of Christ: wounded and grieving, yet humbler and ultimately wiser. We are called to *be* Church, to eagerly and joyfully accept our responsibility to witness to the holiness of the Christian life and to spread the light of God’s presence in our daily lives.

We are the Church—all of us, together, the community of disciples. We may be hurt, confused, angry, afraid. Nevertheless, we are one, and God is with us.

Where can we take our hurt and confusion?

If you can, take them to God in **prayer**. Speak directly to God and tell God how you feel. If you find that difficult right now, try writing God a letter. If you can’t bring it to God at this moment, that’s okay. God will be there when you’re ready.

The **Bible** is a window into the heart—both God’s and ours. The Psalms, for example, express many feelings. Reading a Psalm that expresses your reality is an excellent way to begin working your way through your feelings. The prophets provide insight into human problems and pain. Jesus’ words offer comfort and hope.

The **Eucharistic Celebration** is the place where God’s people are nourished. It is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the wonders of creation and redemption. As we thank God, even in the midst of our pain, for intervening in history, we can ask him to intervene in our midst again. We can bring our sense of betrayal and anger over injustice and suffering to liturgy. The language of liturgy is the only language that can both name the darkness and still recall God’s saving work among us.

Many are discovering even in the strength of their anger a more honest relationship with God. We are on our knees as a Church.