



Archdiocese of Philadelphia  
Office of the Archbishop  
222 North 17th Street  
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December 8, 2011  
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

Dear friends in Christ,

Exactly three months ago, on September 8, I was installed as Archbishop of Philadelphia. In the weeks since, traveling the archdiocese, I've been struck by two things I encounter again and again: the reservoir of good will in our people, and the fidelity of our priests.

The Church in southeastern Pennsylvania has deep roots and an extraordinary legacy of saints, service and public witness. These are profound strengths, built by the faith of generations of Catholic families. But all of these good facts depend on our willingness to sustain them by our actions in the present. Advent is a season of self-examination in the light of God's word; a season of conversion and looking forward in hope to the birth of a Savior at Christmas. There is no better time to speak frankly about the conditions we now face as a community of believers.

Complacency is the enemy of faith. To whatever degree complacency and pride once had a home in our local Church, events in the coming year will burn them out. The process will be painful. But going through it is the only way to renew the witness of the Church; to clear away the debris of human failure from the beauty of God's word and to restore the joy and zeal of our Catholic discipleship.

In the year ahead, we have a grave and continuing obligation to help victims of clergy sex abuse to heal; to create Church environments that protect our young people; and to cooperate appropriately with civil authorities in pursuing justice for both the victims of sexual abuse and those accused.

At the same time, we need to remember that many hundreds of our priests -- the overwhelming majority -- have served our people with exceptional lives of sacrifice and character. Since arriving in September, I have pressed for a rapid resolution of the cases of those priests placed on administrative leave earlier this year. The first months of 2012 will finally see those cases concluded. Whatever the results, the confidence of our people and the morale of our priests have suffered. The hard truth is that many innocent priests have borne the brunt of the Church's public humiliation and our people's anger. The harsh media environment likely to surround the