Dear Bishop Johnson:

Recently, my almost 25-year-old Bible group read Bishop Robert Barron’s *Letter to a Suffering Church* and devoted two discussion evenings to it, about four hours in total. To a member (seven of us at this time, all strong in our faith), were blown away by what we learned from this short book. For instance, the revelation on pages 5-6 stating, “Conservative estimates indicate that the CC in the United States has paid out four billion dollars in sex abuse settlements” rocked us all. How much more by the church in other countries in the rest of the world? What has our Diocese contributed?

Another reader was stunned to once again question how the then-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick continued to get away with egregious abuse throughout his career without restraint from “…numerous bishops, archbishops and cardinals, both in this country and in the Vatican, (who) knew all about McCarrick’s outrageous behavior and did nothing in response to it” but continued to promote him into higher and higher church positions. This lack of action spawned thousands of more instances of horrifying abuse of boys and girls, seminarians and priests in training.

Another reader brought up the sometimes unanswerable question, “Why Do We Stay?” citing page 15, which tell us,’…, studies have indicated that for every one person who joins the Catholic Church today, roughly six are abandoning their Catholicism.”

In the end we pondered the real pain and loss that besets thousands of victims, many damaged in the fragility of their youth. Barron notes on page 87, “…”the scandals of the last many decades, - both the crimes themselves and the cover-ups - disclose that something has gone deeply wrong.That significant numbers of priests felt sufficient moral restraint when it came to physically, psychological and spiritually abusing some of the most vulnerable members of their flocks is simply unconscionable….”it became “a rot, a disease, a threat to the great principles of the Church….”

The resulting pain, ache and anger has seriously damaged many victims as well as those of us who remain members, part of the suffering church. What are we left with? We acknowledge that there is a cry for healing and reconciliation that calls out to heaven and can no longer be ignored. The destruction,, the continuing harm is too great. We must stay and fight as Father Barron suggests.

We hope, Bishop, that you are aware of the open meeting held last fall at St. Theresa’s Church in Des Moines, sponsored by the Parish’s Peace and Justice committee. The session attracted an audience of about 90 people (see attached). A carefully planned evening, featuring a meticulously selected panel of knowledgeable speakers heard hundreds of comments from the audience who sorrowfully, angrily, and tearfully poured out their hurt, disbelief, and wrath at the abuse situation. The biggest problem of the evening turned out to be not enough time to hear all the questions, all the comments. The sponsoring group began planning for a follow up which was soon quashed by the then Bishop and current pastor of St. Theresa’s.

This letter is to ask you lead us in continuing the our search, our need, for reconciliation here in the Des Moines Diocese. How can we end the hate, the discord, the antipathy towards our beloved church through understanding, acceptance, a plan for the future? The answer will require prayer, conversation, many more answers to the many more questions

that sincere Catholics struggle with. Our small group would liked to meet with you to determine what to do and how to to do it. May we call for an appointment soon?

THIS PARAGRAPH NOW DELETED. DOES IT BELONG BACK IN?

I FEEL IT WOULD BE TOO EASY FOR READER TO SUGGEST THAT ALL OF THESE ARE BEING DONE AND NOT PART OF RECONCILIATION

What form (OF FIGHT) will that take? Baron suggests to us that we “Fight by raising (our) voice in protest; fight by writing letters of complaint; fight by insisting that protocol be followed; fight by reporting offenders; fight by pursing the guilty until until they are punished; fight by refusing to be modified by pathetic excuses.” We adopt his dictum, a simple answer: “Stay and Fight.”