

July 1, 2025

His Holiness Pope Leo XIV
Apostolic Palace
Vatican City, 00120

Most Holy Father,

Congratulations on your ascension to the papacy. May your leadership bring peace and unity to the world. Please know that our prayers are with you, our spirits are uplifted, and we remain committed to being open to the Spirit, ready to help transform the face of the earth.

We write you in the name of all members of the Association of United States Catholic Priests (AUSCP), a pastoral and collegial voice of some four-hundred priests serving the church in the US, to express our profound concern about the severely damaged morale of priests across the country. Your encouragement of priests to embrace Gospel values, social justice, and evangelization with a hopeful spirit is most welcomed. Please let us know you walk with us.

The attached document, “Moving Toward Restoring Justice for Priests,” encapsulates the findings from a two-year endeavor of compiling research studies, speaking with canonists, and listening to stories of priests. The analysis found too many cases handled by bishops and superiors lacking *due process*, in violation of Canon law. These infractions have gravely harmed the reputation of priests, caused deep emotional and psychological harm, and eroded the faithful’s trust in the Church’s commitment to justice. The infringement of priest rights include:

- The imposition of premature penalties before a priest has had the opportunity to defend himself,
- Publishing the names of priests as ‘accused’ before substantial and verifiable evidence has been gathered and the investigation completed, including the naming of deceased priests who are unable to defend themselves.

- Continued freezing of priests from their ministry for long periods of time even when there is lack of credible evidence.
- Prolonged and unreliable Vatican processes that can take years to reach a decision.

Such actions, unaware of consequences, ignore the fundamental principle of *presumption of innocence*. Canon Law clearly states that no individual can be punished without a thorough investigation and a fair process. Without *due process*, priests may be wrongly stripped of their duties, and their reputations irreparably harmed. After careful consideration of these issues, we offer our modest recommendations as a first step toward restoring justice and fairness.

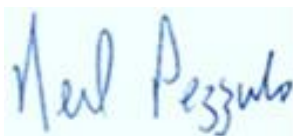
Strict adherence to Canons 1321, 1341, and 1362 is essential to preserving the integrity of the investigative process and restoring trust among the clergy that they are supported and valued by their bishops and the church. The embracement of *due process*, *presumption of innocence*, and the *right to a good reputation* is foundational to the achievement of justice. Equally true is an investigation completed swiftly and competently, thus affirming the legal maxim, “*justice delayed is justice denied*,” which applies to both the accuser and the accused.

We ask you, Holy Father, to prevail upon Church leaders to faithfully follow the law.

The spirit of the AUSCP is rooted in mutual support and a collegial voice that seeks to promote human dignity, foster collaboration with our bishops, and stand in solidarity with those on the margins. Today, we reach out to you, Holy Father, with concern for our brother priests across the United States who have been wounded through no fault of their own. We respectfully approach you with an open spirit to a continuing conversation of enhancing protections against sexual abuse, while ensuring that every victim and named priest cleric receive the *due process* to which they are entitled.

Thank you for your kind attention to our appeal and be assured of our trust in you and your leadership to guide the people of God to move together towards Christ.

Blessings,



Fr. Neil Pezzulo, GHM
Chair, AUSCP Leadership Team



Fr. Stephen P. Newton, CSC
AUSCP Executive Director