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[Home](https://jj.nashuatelegraph.com/)  /  [Archive](https://jj.nashuatelegraph.com/archive/)  /  An open letter to Pope Francis

**An open letter to Pope Francis**

**By Rev. Dr. Stephanie Rutt, presiding minister, Tree of Life Interfaith Temple, - Amherst | Sep 30, 2018**

Your Holiness, Pope Francis,

I write today to humbly offer an idea for action I pray you may consider as you respond to the growing sexual abuse allegations arising in Catholic communities around the world today. Please know that while I do write, in particular, for all those still silent ones, the once helpless, innocent children who wake every morning remembering, I also write for the Priests who would run but cannot escape the hell burning within, and for the Bishops and Cardinals who daily face the relentless knowledge that they knew but turned away. You, kind soul, as Pope, are in the position to answer the silent cries, to shine a beacon of light, far and wide, into the darkest shadows of suffering where only the healing balm of the Holy Spirit can penetrate. Is this not what Jesus would do?

You might wonder who am I to be writing to you? While I am not Catholic, I am an interfaith minister who has a deep and abiding love for Jesus and Mother Mary. In my church in Milford, New Hampshire, USA, there is a tapestry of Mother (Saint) Teresa and one of my most treasured items is a rosary with her picture I received from the Chimayo Chapel in New Mexico, USA, many years ago. Through prayer with the rosary, I have been graced to have experienced healing incidences beyond my understanding. Finally, I worked for many years as a mental health counselor so I know firsthand the long-term effects of abuse.

So, Your Holiness, I write asking you to just imagine what might happen if you were to issue the following edict:

“If just one child has been hurt by our lack of awareness, over site or mismanagement; if just one child has been hurt while serving in our trusted care, indeed, it is one too many. So, unified, we rise up as the living body of Christ, ready to respond as we know our Lord Jesus Christ would have us respond.

Starting immediately, all the major parishes of our Catholic Church, worldwide, will join with their local mental health organizations, agencies or local representatives providing care, to create and sustain, free to the public, centers of healing for all children and adult children who have been victims of sexual abuse by Priests. Furthermore, these healing centers will offer services and programs to the Priests, as well as to those complicit in silence, the Bishops and Cardinals, for our Lord has said in Matthew 25:40-45, *“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”* We will welcome all, victims and perpetrators, as well as those complicit in silence, into the heart of our Lord Jesus through our open doors and we will soothe the wounds of the suffering with the living balm of the Holy Spirit.”

Kind Sir, I implore you to walk in the shoes of the fisherman. Pulse a beacon of light to the lost. Throw out a wide net to rescue those sinking in a bottomless sea of darkness. I pray you be besieged by love everlasting to rise up and answer the cries and lead all who are suffering onto the shores of redemption to be anointed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The silent ones, the lost, the complicit are waiting.

As Mother Teresa once said, *“I believe Jesus is asking this of me and I never say ‘no’ to Jesus.”* As a result, her healing ministry touched the world.

Will you do the same?