

## Transcript from Sr. Nuala Kenny

Greetings.

I'm honoured to participate in this important initiative on safeguarding for the Irish Church and happy to contribute my experience as a Religious Sister, a paediatrician and a medical ethicist

The title I've been given is **Healing in a Wounded Church**

Here Pope Francis made his important observation - you have to heal his wounds; then we can talk about everything else. "Heal the wounds; heal the wounds"

If we look at wounds of the Church and of our world as we entered the covid era, we are dramatically reminded of the profound harms of the clergy abuse crisis, where in fact Jesus' love and care for children was contradicted totally by behaviours of those who were entrusted by God with their care. The wounds from the clergy abuse crisis, from its public revelations in the 70s and 80s, to the period of pandemic in 2020 revealed very important lessons about wounding and harms. There were lessons about the abuse of power, trust and sacred office in harm to the vulnerable young; secrecy, silence and denial to avoid scandal - understood as reputational. Laws, bureaucratic responses of canons, policies and protocols necessary for protection, but not sufficient for long-term prevention, failure to address underlying systemic and cultural factors, and very slow learning by the Church from science

Former Pope Benedict in his March 2010 letter to you, the Faithful in Ireland, made this observation - Only by examining the many elements that gave rise to the present crisis can a clear-sighted diagnosis of its causes be undertaken, and effective remedies be found.

Pope Francis reiterates and emphasizes these in his February 2019 comments at the summit in Rome on protection of minors: It is essential that we acknowledge and condemn with sorrow and shame the atrocities perpetrated by consecrated persons, clerics and all those entrusted with caring for the most vulnerable. Let us beg forgiveness for our own sins and

the sins of others, acknowledge the errors, the crimes and the wounds, be more open and committed along a journey of renewed conversion

This is about atonement - an atonement requires much. First apology and repentance, which itself demands conversion of minds and hearts; care for victims - and not just retributive justice in a legal system but restorative justice for their healing. It requires policies and protocols to develop safeguarding environments, and education of clergy and lay as to the magnitude of the harms of sexual abuse to children and youth; but it also requires that we address underlying issues that are both theological, practical and organizational in the Church

So, as we ended 2019 and entered 2020, vulnerability became a new experience for all; the vulnerability of the coronavirus globally not only compounded the wounds of abuse, but revealed a whole other set of wounds in the pandemic Church. It then raised the notion of vulnerability and wounding to a new level. Vulnerability is understood as inevitable, not optional, in our being, embodied in flesh and bone, and embedded in families and communities. Vulnerability is a condition of the moral life, trusting in others and learning that relations of dependence are open to loss and even abuse. Jesus became vulnerable for us

So, the Church entered the pandemic of 2020, not from a position of strength and health, but from a position of weakness and wounding from the clergy abuse crisis, and the deep revelations of theological and organizational issues therein

But as we then look at the wounds that became more evident in 2020 in the chaos and confusion of covid, we see unprecedented losses in the aging Church of the global North - the West - losses of both priests and people. We see a shift from the euro-centric Church to a global reality. We see the profound loss of religious experience and affiliation for the young. We have witnessed a new understanding of our complicity in colonialism racism and white privilege in the Church, and we have experienced loss of political prestige and power in this time.

For the Church to be a healer, she must recognize she is a wounded one; and this calls for us to return to the prophetic tradition. The prophets taught us in their long journey of faith that lamentation - weeping for our sins and our losses - is crucial, and that we must weep and mourn together.

They also taught us that prophetic criticism demands not future telling, but asking us to look at who it is God called us to be and who we have become - and repent. But it also calls us to prophetic imagination; imagine who and what and how we could become, if we returned to being the people God has called us to be

At the same time as this call to prophetic is crucial to healing wounds, Pope Francis reminds us of the obstacles to the prophetic. Narcissism makes you look at yourself constantly in the mirror; discouragement leads to complaining, and pessimism to thinking everything is dark and bleak. These three things close the door to the Holy Spirit

So, as a doctor thinking of the deep wounds of the Church before we entered covid, now magnified and complicated by covid - as a doctor you would ask what's my prognosis for healing? Can we heal the wounds?

I would list here serious issues – tragedy, fatigue and burnout from all in the Church, all in society. Ongoing silence, and denial of the pain and the suffering, especially by clerics and many in the Church. Polarizing divisions about the Church of the poor - or the Church of the rich, exemplified most egregiously and tragically in the country of my birth, the United States, where the Church has been complicit in privilege.

The challenge to re-found our understanding of the Church from an organization to a community of missionary disciples of Christ, and to rekindle hope in the Resurrection and belief in the Holy Spirit - this is in a time of apparent desolation and loss, and wounding beyond comprehension - a Calvary moment

You have been taught that when we were baptized in Christ Jesus we were baptized into his death. In other words, when we were baptized we went with him into the tomb and joined him in death; so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life, if in union with Christ we imitated his death, we shall also imitate him in his resurrection. We must believe by his wounds we have been healed. [St. Paul's Letter to the Romans]

Our challenge is to be a Resurrection People.