

Jan. 2, 2004

Dear People of Southern Illinois,

The crisis resulting from the sexual abuse of minors by some priests and the failure of some in authority to appropriately address this crisis has been devastating for our church. In July 2002 the bishops of the United States issued a Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Essential Norms to address these issues.

In our own diocese we have been dealing with the crisis caused by allegations of clerical sexual abuse of minors since 1993 when the first priest was removed from ministry. Since that time 14 priests and one deacon have been removed from ministry. I apologize again to the victims of sexual abuse and their families for this horrible crime committed against them. I also apologize to the many parishioners throughout the diocese who were scandalized by these events.

In the past as your bishop I have addressed the way the Diocese of Belleville has been addressing this issue in southern Illinois. In this letter I want to update you once again about our efforts to make sure every child and young person is protected from sexual abuse.

The Audit

As part of the Charter the bishops have undertaken three studies. The first is an audit of each diocese to determine whether they are or are not in compliance with the norms of the Charter. The results of this audit are to be published January 6, 2004.

The auditors were in our diocese June 2-6, 2003 to perform the audit, and the diocese was found to be in compliance with the Charter.

There were two commendations made by the auditors. First, "... that two self-initiated policies, which set forth guidelines for matters related to sexual abuse of children, were established by the Diocese in 1990 and 1993. These policies demonstrated progressive, innovative leadership in this critical area long before the Charter was created."

Second, "... that the diocese has drafted a superceding policy, The Child Protection Policy that goes beyond the requirements of the Charter. This draft policy not only sets forth regulations concerning the reporting and handling of allegations of sexual abuse of children by clergy, but also sets forth procedures for reporting cases of physical abuse or neglect of children within the Diocese."

The Child Protection Policy went into effect in July 2003. At the same time we hired Lynn Muscarello to be the director of our Child Protection Office and victim assistance minister. The diocese continues to maintain its hotline phone number to facilitate the receipt of information of allegations of sexual abuse of a minor (1-800-640-3044).

Articles 8 and 9 of the Charter mandate a second study to insure the accountability of our procedures:

To understand the problem more fully and enhance the effectiveness of our future response, the National Review Board will commission a comprehensive study of the causes and context of the current crisis. The board will also commission a descriptive study, with the full cooperation of our dioceses/eparchies of the nature and scope of the problem within the Catholic Church in the United States, including such data as statistics on perpetrators and victims.

The report on these studies is scheduled to be made public in late February 2004. The first, commissioned by the National Review Board under authority given by the bishops, will study and report on the nature and scope of this crisis. The National Review Board commissioned the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, part of the City University of New York, to do this study, which consists of a survey of all dioceses in this country. The Diocese of Belleville has replied in full to this inquiry. This national study on the nature and scope of this crisis will not refer to the specifics of any one diocese.

The National Review Board has prepared an introduction for the John Jay Study consisting of hundreds of interviews of bishops, victims, parents, and interested parties from across the country. This introduction and the John Jay Study itself will establish the background for the third study which will probe the context and causes of this crisis.

The John Jay Study

Article 7 of the Charter states:

Each diocese/eparchy will develop a communications policy that reflects a commitment to transparency and openness. Within the confines of respect for privacy and the reputation of the individuals involved, diocese/eparchies will deal as openly as possible with members of the community.

Since neither of the two national studies will give specifics of any particular diocese, it seems appropriate and timely for me to present independently an accounting for our diocese. The John Jay Study inquired into the past 50 years of our diocese. In light of Article 7 of the charter I would like to present the results of our review going back to 1950.

For this report to be as complete as possible, we reviewed all diocesan files of priests who have served in the diocese from 1950 until 2002. During that time, a total of 350 priests served in pastoral ministry; 340 were priests of the Diocese of Belleville, five were religious order priests and five were priests of another diocese.

This includes all priests, active or retired and priests who lived in or served in parishes for any period of time or were involved in pastoral work. The number includes both diocesan priests and priests who are members of religious orders.

Each served in some capacity under the diocesan bishop's assignment.

Number of Priests Against Whom Credible Allegations Have Been Made

From 1950-2002, we have determined that allegations of sexual abuse of a minor have been made against 25 different priests, 22 were priests of the diocese of Belleville, 3 were priests of another diocese or religious order. A credible allegation was made against one permanent deacon. At the time the allegations were made three priests were deceased.

Making the allegations does not mean those priests were found guilty of crimes by the civil law beyond a reasonable doubt standard. It means that after careful inquiry, the diocese determined that the accusation(s) against 17 priests have been found credible based upon the Charter's definition of acts that constitute sexual abuse and the outcome of the diocese's investigation of the claims. Some of the 17 priests denied the allegations; others did not.

There were eight other priests accused, to one degree or another, of the sexual abuse of a minor during that time frame. Those allegations were either anonymous or so vague that a full and fair investigation was impossible; or it was determined, after a full investigation, that the charges were without foundation.

Forty-six people have come forward with allegations of sexual abuse as a minor by a priest or deacon from 1950 - 2002. The victims of 15 of the priests with credible allegations against them were male; the victims of the other two priests were female. (The number of victims shown in the Diocesan Financial Report for 2003 shows a higher number because these victims came forward after the John Jay Study was completed.)

Taking into account that 350 priests who have served in this diocese from 1950-2002, the 17 priests who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse of a minor account for slightly less than five percent of the total. This percentage is small but still unacceptable. One is too many.

Time Frame of Occurrence of Misconduct Raised in These Accusations

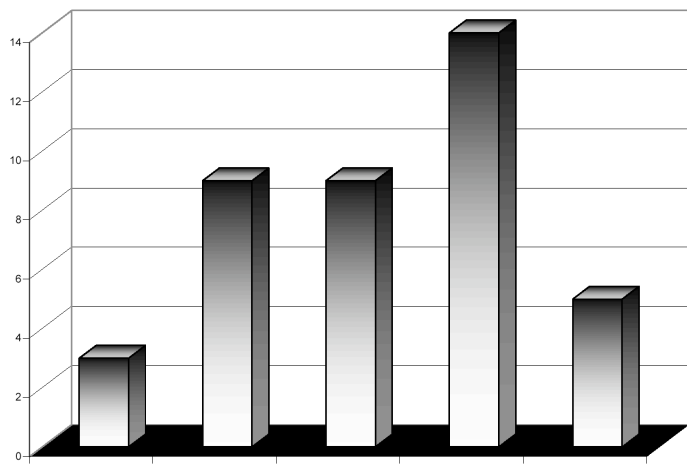
It seems appropriate to indicate the decades in which the misconduct that was involved in the credible allegations from the 46 accusers was alleged to have taken place. The first graph on the left below does so.

1950s – 3
 1960s – 9
 1970s – 9
 1980s – 14
 1990s – 5

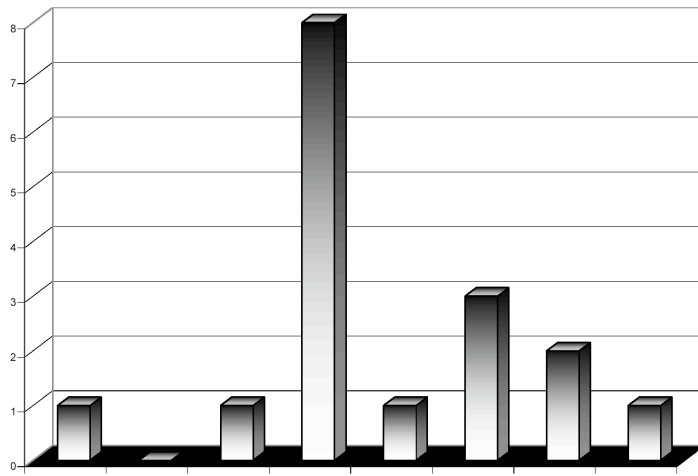
It also seems appropriate to indicate the decades in which the ordinations of the 17 priests with credible allegations took place. The second graph on the right below does so.

1920s – 1
 1930s – 0
 1940s – 1
 1950s – 8
 1960s – 1
 1970s – 3
 1980s – 2
 1990s – 1

Decades covered in John Jay Study in which misconduct took place



Decades of ordination for 17 priests with credible allegations of abuse



There is no priest now working in the diocese, approved for priestly ministry, against whom any credible accusation of sexual abuse of a minor has been made.

Many conclusions will be drawn from these published studies. It is important to realize that child sexual abuse is a universal problem for which little accurate data exists, so it is difficult to relate these figures to other professions or to society at large.

Funds

It is also important to share the total amount of funds paid by the diocese related to these matters. The table below and the accompanying narrative were presented in our diocesan newspaper, *The Messenger*, in its December 5th issue. It was part of the Annual Diocesan Financial Statement. It is included here again for completeness.

(Please see table below.)

There are no diocesan records of monies expended prior to 1993 for these issues.

No monies have been taken from parish funds to pay these expenses. They have been covered by the sale of property, interest on diocesan investments or from unrestricted bequests made to the diocese. No funds were taken from the Annual Bishop's Appeal. For the last three years we have included these expenses in detail in the diocesan annual financial statement and these expenses are included in the audited diocesan accounts.

Essential Norms

The Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons were approved by the Congregation of Bishops in Rome on December 8, 2002. These norms spell out the canonical rules for proceeding with the removal of priests from ministry who have credible allegations of sexual abuse of minors. Currently four of our diocese's cases are in Rome. All of the others will eventually be sent to Rome for determination of their final status.

Diocesan Policy for Child Protection
Article 12 of the Charter states:

Dioceses/eparchies will establish "safe environment" programs. They will cooperate with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children.

Our diocesan policy is available on the diocesan website, www.diobelle.org. Click on Diocesan Resources and then click on Bishop's Letter (Child Protection Policy).

Twenty-two training sessions have been held throughout the diocese since July 2003 to explain the Child Protection Policy and to give specific training in the prevention, recognition and reporting of child abuse. A total of 5,127 individuals have attended these training sessions which were conducted by personnel from the Department of Children and Family Services, professional counselors of sexual abuse victims and diocesan personnel. Diocesan and parish employees, priests and deacons and volunteers who have regular contact with children and parents have been present at these training sessions.

This policy mandates all employees (clergy, lay and religious) and volunteers who have substantial contact with children to complete an application form and a criminal history check. Employment or acceptance of volunteer service is contingent upon a favorable result of the Criminal History Record Checks.

Meetings

Since coming to the diocese in February 1994 I have always been available to meet with victims and have always responded to these requests. The vicar general, Msgr. James Margason, has also met on a number of occasions with victims. The Diocesan Review Board administrator has also met with victims at their request. All of us have found these encounters with victims to be heart-wrenching experiences, but as diocesan authorities we recognize our responsibility not only to be present to these individuals but also to see the need first to apologize to them for what has happened to them before we can offer them ways of healing.

Diocesan Review Board

Our Diocesan Review Board has been in place since 1993. I am most grateful for the invaluable assistance they have been to the diocese and to me as we have investigated the allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy. Their professional expertise, their commitment to searching for the truth, their willingness to give many hours in the course of their work, their concern to protect the children and youth of our diocese, and their consciousness of the possibility of false allegations have been admirable as they fulfill their mandate according to our diocesan policies. I, as well as the people of the diocese, owe them a deep debt of gratitude.

The Future

The ordained priesthood of Jesus Christ has always been and remains a noble vocation. People, especially children, rightly look up to the priest with trust, respect and love. I give thanks to God for the worthy and stalwart priests in the Diocese of Belleville who have lived generously without ever violating their promises and vows. For them this time has not been without pain and shame.

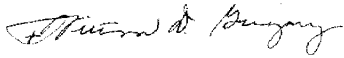
Seminarians are carefully screened and their preparation for the priesthood includes formation in living a celibate chaste life. Ordained clergy are trained to understand the critical importance of boundaries and to be alert to the need to oversee the protection of children by strictly observing the policies that have been put in place.

The Child Protection Policy mandated in July of last year will help us provide both the training for those who have contact with children and putting in place safeguards so that our children will not be put in danger.

Conclusion

I extend to all the Catholics of the diocese and to all the people of goodwill of southern Illinois my sorrow that this misconduct has taken place. I also take joy that we are honestly addressing this problem and acknowledging the ways we failed in the past. We pray that our renewed efforts will be successful and with God's help another child will not be harmed.

Yours in Christ,



+Wilton D. Gregory
Bishop of Belleville

Schedule of Sexual Misconduct Expenses

	Fiscal Years Ended June 30,									Totals
	1993-1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	
Diocesan payments										
Expenses of Priests	\$711,188	\$172,038	\$142,120	\$130,411	\$135,578	\$132,216	\$101,827	\$106,351	\$182,543	\$1,814,272
Therapeutic care of priests (1)	\$79,430	\$72,233	\$34,562	\$27,903	\$58,245	\$30,551	\$20,899	\$24,763	\$5,653	\$354,239
Therapeutic care of victims	\$188,532	\$44,429	\$43,545	\$43,251	\$45,527	\$34,516	\$17,331	\$27,258	\$73,440	\$517,829
Therapeutic care of others	\$4,012	\$2,268	\$0	\$0	\$2,000	\$0	\$350	\$0	\$0	\$8,630
Professional and legal fees	\$223,169	\$47,709	\$12,567	\$28,741	\$6,462	\$7,650	\$7,500	\$6,800	\$13,450	\$354,048
Payments to victims	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$53,000	\$0	\$20,000	\$0	\$223,000
Total diocesan payments	\$1,281,331	\$413,677	\$232,794	\$230,306	\$247,812	\$257,933	\$147,907	\$185,172	\$275,086	\$3,272,018
Insurance payments for defense costs										
June 1994 through October 2000										\$344,654
Total administrative leave expenses										\$3,616,672

(1) Included in "Expenses of Priests" for years ended June 30, 1993 and 1994

As part of our annual diocesan financial report there is a section entitled, "Schedule of Sexual Misconduct Expenses." This report is an update of previously published reports on the expenses the diocese has incurred in this area. You will note that the total amount is just under \$3.3 million dollars for the ten-year period ending June 2003. Insurance payments for defense costs for the same period amounted to an additional \$345,000. The total amount for last year was slightly over \$275,000. This is an increase of about \$90,000 over the previous year.

There are two reasons for the increase: first, the increase in Expenses for Priests because two additional priests were placed on administrative leave; and, second, an increase in victim assistance of over \$45,000 was the result of the diocese going back for ten years and assuming the counseling expenses for a victim.

For the period of 1993 through 2003 the diocese has assisted 54 victims (eight more than those reported in the John Jay Study which did not cover 2003 and came forward during the last year) with counseling and related expenses. In addition, a few family members and some schools were given counseling assistance when their pastors were removed, costing a little over \$525,000. In the past 10 years, the diocese has made settlements with five victims amounting to \$223,000.

The Diocese of Belleville is and will be accountable for these expenses, and all diocesan expenses related to sexual misconduct are included in our diocesan audit.

— Msgr. James Margason, vg