



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

320 Cathedral Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21201 • 410-547-5437 • FAX: 410-727-8234

OFFICE OF THE CARDINAL

February 18, 2004

Dear Friends in Christ:

As you may be aware, the U.S. Catholic Bishops have appointed a lay review board to commission a national study of the 'nature and scope' of past child abuse in our Church. In an effort to carry through our policy of openness, transparency and continued discussion with our Catholic community, I write to you directly to address this matter.

The study, conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, is expected to detail the number of allegations of past abuse, the costs expended as a result of the abuse, and the number of victims alleging abuse, for all 195 dioceses. The resulting report is due for public release on February 27, 2004. A companion report will be issued on the same day by the National Review Board, attempting to identify the cause or causes of this evil that for too long was not adequately addressed. In general, these reports are an effort to better understand the crisis, so that appropriate measures can be taken to prevent this from ever happening again to another child in our care.

Because the John Jay study compiles data on a national scale through the course of five decades, the total number of cases will likely cause anguish among the faithful and will be a deeply painful reminder for those who suffered, and may still be suffering, from abuse. However, the study represents a necessary and important step. Detailing the national scope of abuse—no matter how abhorrent—is necessary to rebuild the trust of our brothers and sisters. The children of our Church cannot and will not be put at risk again.

In September of 2002, I wrote to you announcing the public release of an accounting of priests and religious men who served in our archdiocese who were credibly accused of child sexual abuse. I also released a financial accounting of the funds expended as a result of that abuse. It was the sad reality of what we knew; and when we learned more, we reported more to our community.

Since the disclosure of September 2002, I believe that the Archdiocese of Baltimore has begun to heal. We are healing by taking action. There have since been new policies and procedures implemented to protect children and to reach out to victim-survivors of abuse. These steps have been put in place:

To protect children:

- Every employee is trained to identify, respond to and report suspected child abuse and volunteers are now receiving or will receive the required training.
- Every employee is required to undergo a criminal background check and thorough reference checks are performed for volunteers having substantial contact with children.

- We brought every manager in our organization together at a mandatory convocation to stress that preventing child abuse is a critical responsibility of his or her job.
- Our long-standing, thorough screening procedures and background checks for seminarians, in effect now for some 20 years, have been reviewed and tightened.
- And children involved in church activities have been instructed that they should not be treated or touched by adults in a manner that makes them uncomfortable, and they are encouraged to report such concerns to their parents and/or a designated adult.

To reach out to victim-survivors of abuse:

- We immediately offer to pay for treatment and counseling for every person who comes forward with a credible allegation of abuse.
- We retain a social worker to reach out to victims of abuse.
- We immediately and publicly remove from ministry and thoroughly investigate any priest or religious credibly accused of abuse.
- We immediately report suspected abuse to civil authorities.
- We cooperate fully in investigations and prosecutions.

At the national level, we bishops have unequivocally affirmed our commitment that no priest who ever has sexually abused a child will be allowed to serve in ministry. For the first time, the Holy See has approved binding Church laws requiring each bishop to live up to this standard—reinforcing the pledge we made to one another in the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*.

In January, an independent audit by the Gavin Group of Boston confirmed our compliance with the Charter. The audit commended the Archdiocese of Baltimore for its safe environment program, its lay review board and its code of conduct for personnel having regular contact with children. To that end, I thank each priest, religious man and woman, administrator, and teacher who worked diligently to turn these new crucial policies into an every day practice. To those victims of abuse, I once again apologize and humbly ask for forgiveness on behalf of our Church.

I have said before that the opportunity to rise above scandal lies in how an institution responds—answering evil with acts of holiness. In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, we have rededicated ourselves to our mission and faith. Please pray for those who have been abused, for our Church, for our good priests who serve God's people, for all the faithful, and for me and all the bishops, as we continue on our journey of healing and repentance. May God bless each of you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Archbishop of Baltimore