



Survivors Network of those Abused By Priests
P.O. Box 20491, Long Beach, CA 90814
SNAPnetwork.org

February 19, 2007

Bishop Robert H. Brom
Diocese of San Diego
3888 Paducah Drive
San Diego, CA 92117

Dear Bishop Brom:

We must express our deep concerns about your possible plans to seek bankruptcy protection for your diocese. The process, the timing, the professed reasons are all highly suspect.

First, the process:

At a bare minimum, we respectfully urge you to delay any such decision for several months, and spend that time in genuine dialogue with San Diego Catholics about the needs of all parties involved: victims, lay people, clergy, and parish employees.

For you to rush into court at this point, without any real consultation with or explanation to your flock, would be unwise, unjust and unhealthy, we feel.

Just a few years ago, Pope John Paul II spoke publicly of a 'crisis of confidence' in the institutional leadership of the American church. He talked of the need for a 'shared responsibility' between the lay faithful and the hierarchy. We hope you will listen to and embrace his call for greater collaboration within the body of the Church.

In the interest of openness and transparency, which you and your brother bishops have promised, we beg you to enable your flock and your staff from across the entire diocese to hear directly from you, have a chance to question you, and have an opportunity to ponder and 'weigh in' on such a crucial decision.

We humbly suggest that in the weeks ahead, you schedule one open meeting in each of the diocesan deaneries, at which parishioners and church employees could learn from you about the diocese's situation and ask questions.

Then, and only then, might your flock feel better about a course of action that seems likely to embroil everyone - victims, lay people, clergy, and parish employees -- in years of perhaps preventable legal conflict.

Second, the timing:

In Tucson, Davenport, Spokane and Portland, church officials sought the court's protection on the eve of potentially damaging and embarrassing civil sex abuse trials. That's happening again here.

In each case, because of the timing, victims, Catholics, journalists and other observers raised troubling and legitimate concerns. They wondered aloud about the misuse of bankruptcy – not to preserve assets, but rather to keep secret evidence of sex crimes and cover-ups by church officials.

Rushing into bankruptcy now will no doubt cause similar doubts among parishioners, victims and the public in San Diego. Instead of moving the diocese toward resolution, a bankruptcy filing here now will only deepen already severe doubts about the sincerity of diocesan leaders.

Only a complete disclosure of secret church documents, including all documents related to priest perpetrators, secret financial settlements (including your own), and the immediate end to alleged document destruction by church officials will allay these fears about your true intentions to seek bankruptcy protection.

Third, the professed reasons:

You claim resolving the child sex abuse and cover up litigation may hurt the church's activities. But at the same time, you have never fully disclosed diocesan assets. You claim you're concerned about your church's "mission and stewardship," but we believe you want to stop upcoming child sex abuse trials so your role in these horrific crimes will remain hidden.

We challenge you to fully disclose, to independent parties, all of the insurance coverage, property, cash balances, cash reserves, money market accounts and other sources of wealth in your diocese. Until you do this, Catholics should disbelieve your claim that the diocese's work may be hurt if child sex victims are fairly compensated.

For all these reasons, we urge you to reject bankruptcy as an option. If you don't reject bankruptcy, we urge you to move slowly and carefully, with the full input of your flock, in that direction, and only after you fully disclose the extent of your diocesan wealth.

We also ask, in the spirit of openness and fairness, for the chance to do what you've done: give your side of this story to San Diego Catholics through church bulletins. This Sunday, we respectfully ask that we be given this opportunity, so that your flock will have a chance to be better informed

In your letter yesterday, you urged victims to continue to seek reconciliation and healing. For most of us, our healing is helped each time we get a chance to speak the truth, warn parents, protect kids and educate Catholics. Toward that end, we ask for your permission to put an insert into all parish bulletins giving our perspective on this painful matter.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

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