



**Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska
1316 Peger Road
Fairbanks, AK 99709**

Bishop's Office

February 15, 2008

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Let me begin by thanking you for your past support for the Alaskan Shepherd and our mission here in Northern Alaska. You may read in the news or hear reports about our diocese filing for reorganization under Chapter 11 of the Bankruptcy Code. The case will be filed in the federal Bankruptcy Court. This hopefully consensual plan was taken in response to lawsuits by Alaskans who have been harmed by priests, ministers and volunteers in the Fairbanks diocese. I do not take this step lightly and I would like to take a moment to address the issues surrounding the cases.

First, I would like once again to extend a heartfelt apology to anyone harmed by certain members of the Catholic Church. A little more than five years ago when I became Bishop to Northern Alaska and these cases began to come forward I sought and continue to seek a way to bring healing to those who were harmed. All these cases stem from actions taken decades ago. From the start I have offered and continue to offer counseling for those seeking it. However, I believe real healing will only begin following a resolution of the cases themselves.

Let me also assure you even before the scope of these allegations became clear we were working to make our parishes, schools and rectories safer for children and vulnerable adults. Anyone who has extended contact with children, such as a teacher, supervisor, volunteer or organizer, must undergo a criminal background check. We immediately report any allegations of abuse to the appropriate law enforcement authorities. We have an independent committee that investigates any claims of abuse that arise. Our efforts have earned commendations by auditors who annually review dioceses in conjunction with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

Unfortunately, despite these actions, we face more than 150 lawsuits from more than 140 individuals. While we have engaged in litigation we recognize this is far from a pastoral solution to anyone harmed by the Church. We have engaged in settlement negotiations with the plaintiffs, but for various reasons, including the unwillingness to participate by a key insurance carrier for the diocese, these negotiations have not proved fruitful.

Given the high cost of litigation, the unwillingness of our key insurance carrier to participate in a meaningful manner, and the unsuccessful negotiations for settlement, it has become increasingly clear to me that our already poor diocese cannot continue in this same direction. As you well know we are the United States' single truly missionary

diocese. Just 8 of the 46 parishes within the geographic territory of the diocese are financially self-sustaining. For years we have only been able to keep the flame of faith burning in the remote parishes within the area of the diocese thanks to generous donors like you. I take my responsibilities as Christ's Vicar seriously. I am legally and morally bound to both fulfill our mission and to pursue healing for those injured.

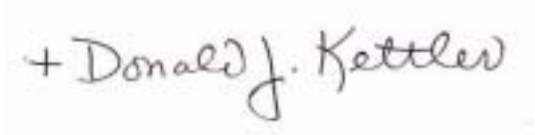
It now seems the fairest and most pastoral resolution would be to seek a consensual plan for reorganization under Chapter 11 of the United States Bankruptcy Code. While this is not my first choice, I believe that at this time, this is the best way to bring all parties together and to provide for fair and equitable treatment of all who have been harmed. It also allows us to continue to spread God's Word in Northern Alaska. As a donor and concerned patron let me assure you we are committed to protecting any donation offered for our work. Money designated for the missions will serve the missions.

While we strive to find a pastoral healing of past harms, we must also honor the priests, religious and holy men and women of our diocese striving to do God's will today. On behalf of these extraordinary workers in God's vineyard, let me extend my thanks for all you have done to keep our ministries alive.

Please join me in praying this path begins a real process of healing for those injured. It may take years, but I'm determined to restore the trust of God's people in the Church and continue what Pope Pius XI called "a most difficult mission." I will periodically update you on the progress we are making. In the meantime, I ask that you continue to support our most important mission.

If you have questions please contact Robert Hannon: (907) 374-9510 / robert@cbna.org; or Ronnie Rosenberg: (907) 374-9511 / ronnie@cbna.org

God bless us all.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Donald J. Kettler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Bishop Donald J. Kettler, JCL