

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

Bishop's Office

16 February, 2008

TO THE LAITY, RELIGIOUS, AND CLERGY OF THE FAIRBANKS CATHOLIC
DIOCESE

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ Jesus:

All of you know the legal challenges that we have been facing in the Fairbanks Diocese because of wrongs committed by some priests and workers in the Church decades ago. I have determined that filing a petition for Chapter 11 reorganization for the Fairbanks Diocese in United States Bankruptcy Court is the most pastoral and prudent course for the multiple legal challenges facing the diocese.

Before explaining why I am taking this action, I want to reflect on some powerful words the Holy Father recently wrote regarding hope. In Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Spe Salvi* he observed:

“Certainly we must do whatever we can to reduce suffering: to avoid as far as possible the suffering of the innocent; to soothe pain; to give assistance in overcoming mental suffering. These are obligations both in justice and in love, and they are included among the fundamental requirements of the Christian life and every truly human life.”

Spe Salvi 36

The Holy Father goes on to point out a path through pain towards healing:

“It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love.”

Spe Salvi 37

The Pope's words could not be timelier for me as I seek to justly redress the spiritual, and emotional wounds of all those who have been abused by workers for the Church. These individuals deserve our compassion, respect, and our love. I continue to express my deep sorrow and regret to anyone harmed by Church workers. Indeed, in our own individual ways, we have all been wounded by past misconduct of clergy, staff and volunteers.

Now however, we must work through the suffering towards the hope of love and reconciliation; in that way we continue and even augment the mission that Christ has entrusted to us. That mission is desperately needed in our society, perhaps even more so

now than at any other time in our history. Today, God gives us that encouragement, and we in turn console others, especially all who have been harmed by members of our very own household of faith.

We fully realize our responsibility to help heal the hurt of persons who were abused by workers for the Church in our Diocese. A Chapter 11 reorganization will help us to do that.

We also fully realize our responsibility to continue the mission that we believe we have received from Jesus Christ: to provide spiritual care, to educate children in the faith, to feed, clothe, and shelter the needy, and to advocate for the least among us.

Supported by generations of Catholics through the generosity of their time, talent, and treasure, this has been our mission for more than 100 years. We believe that continuing this mission is essential to our communities and is an expression of our very being as Catholics.

Reorganizing through what we hope will be a consensual Chapter 11 plan will help us to continue to carry out the mission of the Church and ministries of the Diocese, including our efforts to create safe environments for children at all our parishes and schools.

I firmly believe that Chapter 11 is the best way for the Diocese to work constructively with those who have been harmed – those who have pursued compensation and those who have not; those who are currently known and those who have not yet made the decision to come forward.

In the coming weeks, the process of reorganization will open our Diocese to increased public scrutiny. I believe that is a good thing. We will be open and transparent in this process.

I will do my best to keep you informed as the process continues. We will be setting up some special pages on our diocesan Internet site where you can access information. And, I ask you to keep me informed as well.

We have been struggling to find a way – the best way – to respond to those who are seeking compensation for the harm they suffered, a way that also will allow us to continue the mission of the Church in our Diocese.

Please continue to pray. Please pray for me, for one another, and for all those among us who are hurting.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Donald J. Kettler

Bishop Donald J. Kettler, JCL