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— Bernard Cardinal Law

Law apologizes for abusive priests

By MICHAEL LASALANDRA

In his strongest words yet on the subject, Bernard Cardinal Law has “begged the forgiveness” of all who have been hurt as a result of sexual abuse by priests.

“I know of nothing that has caused greater pain to the church than has this phenomenon of abuse,” Law wrote in a column in the latest issue of *The Pilot*, Boston’s Catholic newspaper. “With all my heart, I beg forgiveness of all who have been hurt by such acts of abuse,” he said.

Law’s words were timed to coincide with the culmination of a series of five healing Masses throughout the Archdiocese of Boston. The Masses are designed, he said, “to implore the healing of Jesus for the pain and suffering caused by sexual abuse of children by clergy.”

The last of the Masses will be held tomorrow at St. Julia’s Church in Weston. The Masses are seen as a way for the church to admit mistakes in handling abuse and to

make clear its intention not to repeat them. The Masses are also seen as a way for abuse victims to begin to trust the church again.

John Walsh, spokesman for the archdiocese, called Law’s words “a very strong statement. We’ve heard from people who have been victimized and it’s important for them to hear acknowledgment, regret and sorrow.”

While the Masses are about to end, he said, the archdiocese will continue to reach out.

“We didn’t think these Masses will wave a magic wand and make the problem go away,” Walsh said. “We’re committed to doing what we can in a pastoral way to assist and to continue to look at ourselves. We’re not under any illusions.”

Nationally, sexual abuse by priests has been one of the most difficult and expensive problems with which the church has had to deal. The church has had to pay tens of millions of dollars in lawsuits to victims, including several in the Boston archdiocese.

The most recent situation involved accusations of abuse against a retired priest, the

Rev. John J. Geoghan. He is charged with abusing some 30 children over a period of 30 years while serving at five parishes in Greater Boston.

Phil Saviano, New England coordinator for the national Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, praised Law’s words but said neither they nor the Masses are enough.

“His saying that this is a problem is at least a step in the right direction,” Saviano said. “It wasn’t that many years ago he was denying the problem even existed. So maybe this is something the church can build on. But it’s going to take more than prayers and Masses.

“I hear from a lot of people who are in various stages of dealing with being abused by priests and most don’t want to go anywhere near a Catholic church,” Saviano said. “The church is the last place they’d go for guidance or healing. They are still too traumatized.

“I think the healing will come when survivors have a strong sense that this problem is not going to continue. I don’t think we’re anywhere near that point right now.”