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June 23, 2006

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the past two weeks, we have heard and read much speculation about the handling of misconduct allegations against Fr. Ochoa. In view of the extensive media attention that has been focused on this matter, I feel I must set the record straight to reassure you about the manner in which this was handled. At the end of this letter, I have included a detailed chronology of the events that lead to my reporting Fr. Ochoa to the authorities.

As I have stated in the past, I maintain a zero tolerance policy for child sexual abuse. When Fr. Ochoa admitted to the recent incident as well as to two previous incidents, I immediately placed him on administrative leave, removed him from all ministries and removed his ability to function as a priest. I confirmed his full understanding of his status before he left that meeting. Contrary to some media reports, I assure you that neither I nor any member of the Chancery staff had any prior knowledge of this or any previous incidents involving Fr. Ochoa. In fact, we personally reviewed Fr. Ochoa's personnel file in 2002 and again when these allegations came to light, and found no evidence of these incidents.

The District Attorney's Office confirmed publicly that the Diocese came forward in a "fairly expedient fashion." From the time that this incident was reported we have fully cooperated with the Sheriff's department in their investigation, and continue to do so. I have personally spoken to the detective on at least four occasions, and answered fully and truthfully any and all questions asked of me. In addition, other key members of the Chancery staff who were contacted have cooperated fully. At the specific request of the Sheriff's Department, I delayed release of my public announcement regarding Fr. Ochoa's status.

At all times we have acted in good faith, and I believe with reasonable speed, to notify the authorities of any information that we receive. Since Fr. Ochoa had many loyal supporters in Sonoma County, I did not consider him to be a flight risk and am dismayed by his decision to flee. When I learned that Fr. Ochoa might be in Mexico, I personally notified the Bishop of Tijuana and the Cardinal in Guadalajara of Fr. Ochoa's status and of his possible presence in their area. I have written to Fr. Ochoa through his

family in Mexico and urged his immediate return to California. At least two members of the clergy who received telephone calls from Fr. Ochoa have also implored him to return.

During the events of the past decade, we have learned many lessons and made substantial changes in our dealing with priests and others who commit such heinous acts. Each new situation -- this one included -- presents us with new lessons and new opportunities to improve our policy to ensure that our actions correspond with my policy of zero tolerance. It grieves me deeply that once again we are facing the knowledge that a priest has betrayed the trust of the faithful, and of the community. I pray that you continue to hold strong in your faith, even in these difficult days.

Much to my sorrow, many personal details about this recent incident were made public in the newspaper. I have grave concerns about the hurt that this publicity may cause the young victim and his family, and ask that you be sensitive to the difficulty they may be experiencing and continue to keep them in your prayers. Once again I urge any victims of sexual abuse by Fr. Ochoa, or anyone else connected with the Church, to come forward and contact either law enforcement or our Victims Assistance Coordinator, Julie Sparacio, at 566-3308.

Again, I ask for your continued prayers for all victims, their families, and the parishioners and faithful who are affected by these reprehensible acts.

Your Brother and Servant in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daniel F. Walsh".

Most Reverend Daniel F. Walsh
Bishop of Santa Rosa

CHRONOLOGY OF OCHOA REPORT

Thursday, April 27th - 9:30pm- Bishop returns home from Mission Conference in Florida and receives voice mail from Msgr. Whelton advising of a meeting Friday afternoon with Fr. Ochoa on a sensitive matter.

Friday, April 28th - morning- Bishop receives memo from Msgr. Whelton providing some details of the alleged incidents and confirming the meeting. Bishop calls Vicar General Msgr. Pulskamp and requests that he attend the meeting.

Friday, April 28th - 2:00pm- Meeting held with Bishop, Fr. Ochoa, Fr. Epperson and Msgr. Pulskamp. Fr. Ochoa admits the truth of the Sonoma incident, and reveals 2 prior incidents in Napa and Mexico which were unknown to the Bishop until that moment. Bishop immediately places Fr. Ochoa on administrative leave and removes his faculties to function as a priest. Bishop confirms with Fr. Ochoa his status.

Saturday, April 29th - @1:30pm- Bishop consults with Diocesan Attorney and determines that the Diocesan Attorney will make the report on the Sonoma incident on Monday morning in a manner consistent with prior reports.

Monday, May 1st - morning- Diocesan Attorney's office phones Child Protective Services (CPS) to advise that a report is coming and gets address and fax number. Diocesan Attorney's report is faxed to CPS. Msgr. Whelton reviews Fr. Ochoa's file and verifies that there is no information therein regarding the Napa and Mexico incidents.

Tuesday, May 2nd - morning- Diocesan Attorney's office receives voice mail message from CPS advising that the report needs to be sent to the Sheriff's Office and providing fax number. Report is faxed to the Sheriff's Office.

Wednesday, May 3rd - morning- Diocesan Attorney's office learns that Sheriff's Office cannot locate report, which is re-faxed to Sheriff's Office at a different number.

Wednesday, May 3rd - afternoon- Bishop has first of several phone calls with Sheriff's detective (May 5th, 9th and 12th).

Friday, May 5th - Sheriff's Office requests that Diocese postpone its public announcement to the parishes regarding Fr. Ochoa's status so as to not hinder the investigation.

Weekend of May 21st & 22nd - Diocese releases announcement to parishes regarding Fr. Ochoa's status.