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AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE IN RESPONSE TO RECENT MEDIA REPORTS

BY MSGR. STEPHEN DOKTORCZYK, VICAR GENERAL, DIOCESE OF ORANGE 12/7/2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The scourge of sexual abuse of minors and others in our society is real and no one ever should attempt to explain it away, make excuses for it, or cover it up. Exploitation of those most vulnerable not only is repugnant in the eyes of the law, but repugnant to God. Only by honestly and openly confronting the issue, and by and through bold preventative and remedial measures aimed to enjoin and unmask violations, may we eradicate sexual abuse in our society.

The Diocese of Orange, established in 1976, was not exempt from perpetrators in the ranks of its clergy. The Diocese's own abuse scandal, culminating in the well-documented and openly publicized 2005 settlement, remains (and always will remain) an ugly chapter in our history. But it is a chapter that we must recall so that together – with the help of God, but with the ultimate responsibility and ownership resting in the hearts and minds of men – may we ensure that we are at the forefront of preventing abuse in our community. This commitment within the Diocese is longstanding and unwavering.

In 2002, former Bishop of Orange, Tod D. Brown, in accordance with the Charter for the Protection of Young People published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, established the Sexual Abuse Oversight Review Board, which continues to be blessed with capable laypeople from various walks of life and competencies. The board's mission is to protect young people. While the Diocese of Orange has looked for guidance from the National Church, we have acted independently and boldly to fulfill the mission.

In 2013, shortly after his nomination as the fourth bishop of Orange, Bishop Kevin Vann, following the recommendations of the Oversight Review Board, deputized a retired FBI agent to regularly monitor those priests who were sentenced to live a life of prayer and penance (outside of ministry).

In 2016, at his own initiative and to further transparency, Bishop Vann ordered to be published on the diocesan website, names of living priests incardinated in (belonging to) the Diocese of Orange who had been credibly accused of the sexual abuse of a minor. While efforts are in place to expand the original parameters of the list, it must be made clear that the number of known abusers holding the rank of cleric in the history of the Diocese of Orange is nowhere close to the figure of 72 recently suggested in public. Moreover, there are no known child sex offenders in active ministry in the Diocese.

Amidst the good works the Lord asks us to do, including care and concern for the poor, weak and vulnerable, the Catholic Church in Orange has in place numerous safeguards so that the protection of the young may be at the forefront of the minds of all its members, clerical and lay alike. We will never yield in that commitment and promise. And we will continue to explore additional self-governance models to further realize the promise that we make to the faithful.

Our priests – and all other employees of our Diocese – are held to the highest standard. We work hard to ensure our parishes and schools are inspiring, faith-centered environments that are welcoming, compassionate and, above all else, safe. The steps we have taken and continue to take to ensure safety and accountability are effective and worthy of note.

In all of our difficulties, may Jesus Christ, the hope of the world and healer of souls, be praised.

Msgr. Stephen Doktorczyk

Vicar General, Diocese of Orange

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