

March 2006

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I am pleased to report that for the period of September 2004 to September 2005, our Diocese was found once again to be in compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. An audit conducted by the Gavin Group last September verified the efforts the Diocese has made and continues to make in maintaining a safe environment for children. Details of this report are provided below.

Let me first say that I regret that this positive news is tempered by two recent events, both of which have been previously reported. One is an allegation made in February against a priest in the Diocese. The priest has been removed from ministry pending an investigation. Also in early February, there was detailed coverage of a deposition I gave last summer about events that occurred more than 20 years ago. I know that some of my words in that deposition have caused pain to many in the Diocese and have hurt our Church. For all of the hurt I have caused by my words and decisions, by what I have done or ought to have done, I am truly sorry. I ask your forgiveness and prayers.

As of mid-December, 51,239 children in Catholic Schools and Religious Education programs had participated in safe environment training. Although classes are provided for children and youth, the Diocese recognizes that parents are the primary educators of their children. To assist parents in fulfilling this responsibility, the Diocese developed a brochure, *Parent Guide – Understanding & Preventing Child Sexual Abuse*. It was designed to provide parents with information about sexual abuse and ways to keep their children safe, as well as to give them suggestions for talking to their children about the subject of abuse. This brochure was distributed to parents of school children and religious education students, as well as to parents at the Daybreak Shelter. It is available at [www.dioceseofjoliet.org](http://www.dioceseofjoliet.org)

Since the implementation of the *Charter*, more than 66,000 adults in the Diocese have attended the Virtus *Protecting God's Children* program and over 26,000 adults have undergone background screenings. This is in accord with the diocesan policy that prior to beginning employment/volunteer service, all individuals involved with minors on a regular, recurring basis, or those who would have the opportunity to be alone with children during parish, school or religious education-sponsored events are required to present the results of a criminal background investigation and proof of attendance at a *Protecting God's Children* program. See [www.dioceseofjoliet.org](http://www.dioceseofjoliet.org) for information about safe environment requirements.

During the 2005 audit period (September 2004-September 2005), six allegations of sexual abuse were received by the Diocese. Two of these accusations were placed against religious order priests, one was against a

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deceased priest and one against a priest who had already left the priesthood. The other two accusations, made against priests in active ministry, were determined by the Review Committee to be unsubstantiated. There are no credible allegations against any priest in active ministry.

A total of \$129,287.86 was expended this past fiscal year (July 1, 2004 – June 30, 2005) on areas related to sexual abuse. This amount included \$12,222.44 for the USCCB Audit and other administrative expenses; \$9,050.00 for consultants' fees; \$6,050.00 for counseling fees; \$17,995.54 for the *Protecting God's Children* program; \$278.25 for background screenings of diocesan personnel; \$79,641.63 for legal fees; \$4,050.00 for miscellaneous expenses. In addition to those amounts, there was a settlement in the amount of \$30,000 during the past fiscal year that was paid by our insurance program.

The Joliet Diocesan website, [www.dioceseofjoliet.org](http://www.dioceseofjoliet.org), will carry a list of diocesan priests against whom a credible allegation of sexual misconduct with a minor has been made. We have taken this step in the hope of further facilitating healing and closure for those who have been affected by the tragedy of sexual abuse of a minor.

Anyone who may have been victimized by a member of the clergy is asked to contact Sister Mary Frances Seeley, our Victim Assistance Coordinator, at 815-263-6467. The Diocese treats all allegations of sexual abuse with a prompt, direct and confidential pastoral response which may include counseling, spiritual direction, support groups or other social services. I also offer to meet with anyone who has been abused and will do whatever I can to help with their healing. When we learn of allegations against priests, we notify the States Attorney's office and comply with all requirements of the Department of Children and Family Services.

The Diocese has made great efforts to ensure that children are protected from harm. We take this responsibility seriously. Thank you for your cooperation and for all you continue to do in helping to keep children safe. We can accomplish much together.

With every best wish,

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Joseph L. Imesch  
Bishop of Joliet