



Diocese of San Bernardino
Office of the Bishop

May 7, 1993

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The people of God are not immune from difficult and troubling times. The past few weeks have been such times for our Diocese.

During this period, the people of the Riverside area have been subjected to a barrage of press coverage concerning sexual abuse by priests and a lay volunteer. Recent reports have centered around separate and distinct allegations of sexual misconduct towards minors. Two of these allegations pertain to conduct which purportedly transpired six and twenty-two years ago, respectively. We are currently addressing these allegations in a context of clear and forthright actions, coupled with candor towards our parishioners and sensitivity to those directly involved. Our actions have included reaching out to the purported victims and their families.

The extensive coverage by the Riverside Press Enterprise over the past two weeks could be misinterpreted as indicating that this matter is uniquely a Catholic issue, or that child abuse among clergy is in disproportion to other sectors of our society. Such is not the case at all. However, even one allegation is one too many. Even one case of proven child abuse is wholly unacceptable. That such allegations may involve a member of the clergy, regardless of denomination, must be condemned.

During the past several years, the Diocese of San Bernardino, together with the rest of society, has increased its awareness of the tragic effects of child abuse in its many forms. Most abuse of children takes place in the home; some studies suggest that sixty percent of child abuse occurs in this environment. Providers of child services account for about twenty percent. If the Riverside Press Enterprise would give as much coverage to the overall problem of child abuse as it does to alleged clerical offenders, child abuse as a societal problem would be better served. However, perhaps the disproportionate attention Catholic clergy abuse cases have received in the United States has rendered a service to our Church. We are now far more aware of the problem and far more active in prevention, not only among Church clergy, but within the context of our entire society.

The Church in San Bernardino and Riverside counties has taken steps to address the problem of child abuse, both to clergy, religious and lay leaders, and to society as a whole, as this problem impacts our entire social fabric. The Diocese has held classes and workshops to help recognition of abuse, and what to do when the signs of abuse become apparent. Guidelines have been developed and distributed to church personnel.

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Action has been outlined concerning proper handling of the offender, and the necessary steps for outreach and sensitive assistance to the victim.

It is anguishing that any priest is the subject of allegations. Assistance is being given to these priests. However, all priest of our diocese are affected by such charges. They sense that aspersion is cast over all them. Some feel abandoned, even betrayed, especially by the extensive press coverage. They do not abuse children; on the contrary, they actively assist in helping to prevent child abuse in their parishes, and counsel and assist victims. I can confirm the dedication and hard work of the priests of our Diocese. They are extremely dedicated and are carrying a heavy load due to the rapid increase of population in our two counties. I ask for respect and support for our priests.

As Christians engaged in Christ's work, we need to reach out to victims and assist them in getting the help that is available. Your local parish knows how to put you in contact with qualified professionals. Become aware of the signs of possible abuse in any form, and take the necessary steps to report and stop it. Cases which go unreported only compound the evil.

Use the resources of the Diocese such as workshops, speakers, and materials on child abuse and reporting. For further reference, the diocesan policy handbook is made available to all school personnel and those involved in our parish work. Catholic Charities can also provide highly professional counseling in this area.

Finally, I ask for your prayers. We must ask for the power and grace of God to confront this demon in our Church and community. In the end, God's almighty power and love will triumph. Nearly two thousand years ago, God's miraculous power transformed the tragic event of Good Friday into an Easter Sunday. Pray that Christ through his Church may help us today pass from our present Good Friday to an Easter Sunday of love and peace, in Christ, and with one another.

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