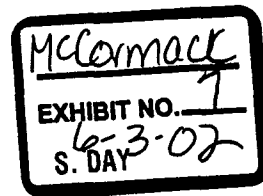


## The Diocese of Manchester News and Events



May 24, 2002

News and  
Events  
Home

Bishop's  
Address to  
New  
Hampshire

Bishop's  
Tidings  
Article

Upcoming  
Events

Calendar of  
Events

### ADDRESS TO THE CHURCH & PEOPLE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE BISHOP JOHN B. McCORMACK MAY 2, 2002

Tonight I speak directly to you, my fellow Catholics, about our Church in New Hampshire, and to you, my fellow citizens, about how the Catholic Church is working to protect children in our society.

We have heard a great deal about sexual abuse of minors by priests. While much has been written and said about this terrible crime and sin, I want to make a clear statement that reveals my thoughts and concerns.

I know who the victims are.

- The victims are young people who have suffered abuse by a priest.
- The victims are their parents, and their families who share this profound hurt.

To the victims and your families, I am deeply sorry that you have been harmed by those you trusted. I beg your forgiveness. In the words we Catholics use during Mass, I ask forgiveness "for what we have done and for what we have failed to do."

I know that to ask forgiveness without showing penitence or without a resolve to change is an empty gesture. As Bishop of The Church in New Hampshire, I will attempt to receive your forgiveness by taking action.

When I talked to high school students at Trinity High in Manchester recently, I encouraged them to ask questions. Their questions cut to the heart of the matter. One asked me how could the Church allow this to happen? Our Church is an institution inspired by God but run by people, and people make mistakes. But people can also learn from their mistakes and repair the institution they have harmed.

**As I looked on the students' faces so eager and so full of promise, I knew I needed to talk openly with them and with you about sexual abuse. Although not a parent, I think I gained an insight as to how parents must feel when they think their child could ever suffer this unthinkable act.**

**What I felt that day can best be summarized by saying "Never again."**

- **Never again will a priest remain in ministry who has abused a child.**
- **Never again will the Church's focus drift from the care and support of victims.**
- **Never again will a veil of silence enshroud the Church when it comes to dealing with the problems of sexual abuse.**

**In order for you to trust that I can lead in the right direction and follow through on the steps I outline, you have to put a measure of faith in my word. In recent months some of you have questioned my ability as bishop to lead your Church. I understand your feelings, and I want you to measure my words by my actions.**

**I know that my service in the Archdiocese of Boston has been the subject of many questions. Let me tell you about it.**

**After being ordained a priest in 1960, I served the Archdiocese of Boston until 1998 when I came here to be the ninth Bishop of Manchester. There I was a parish priest, a pastor, an administrator in the Catholic Charities office, and for 10 years a Cabinet Secretary in Cardinal Law's administration. In 1995, I was ordained a Bishop and served as an Auxiliary in Boston until I came here.**

**It was in late 1984, that Cardinal Law appointed me Secretary for Ministerial Personnel. In that position I had responsibility for planning, budgeting and administrative problem solving for departments within the Archdiocese. My role as cabinet secretary was to provide administrative support. While in this position I did not assign or reassign priests. I assigned my first priest only when I became Bishop of Manchester.**

**In the late eighties and early nineties, reports involving sexual misconduct by priests became more frequent. This began my work in the area of sexual abuse by priests. In 1992 I took responsibility for the management of all sexual misconduct complaints and helped to develop and then implement our first written policy.**

**Let me share a few observations about this experience.**

**I know that I and many others in the Church do a much better job today in listening to victims and acting definitively in areas of abuse of a child than we did at first. I know we made mistakes.**

**There was not a clear and non-judgmental way for people with**

complaints to come forward and tell their story. At first, I think we were not as sensitive as we should have been in helping people to tell us of abuse. We needed someone other than a priest who could help persons tell their stories and then serve as an advocate during the process that followed. I made such help available in Boston. In New Hampshire, we have lay people meeting with and assisting individuals who bring a complaint of abuse.

Did our process cloak itself in confidentiality to such a point that secrecy become counterproductive? Yes. And did that secrecy foster a sense that we were protecting our own and not caring enough for the victim? Yes. I understand that the price of this confidentiality has been the loss of trust.

While my concerns were always to protect children, I am saddened the Church's process extended the hurt and created mistrust. We will not make this mistake again.

During my service in Boston it was my intent to never recommend a priest be placed in an assignment where he would be in contact with children if he had an allegation of sexual abuse. In certain instances, following expert medical advice, I did recommend that a priest with this history be placed in a restricted assignment, such as a nursing home, a facility for retired priests or other situations in which he would serve only adults. Although I thought that was a responsible way to deal with the situation then, I now know it is not. A priest with a credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor will not serve in any ministry in our Diocese.

Recently there has been a great deal of information released about Father Paul Shanley. People ask how could you have allowed him to continue in ministry when you knew of his past abuses?

Regretfully, I didn't know of these abuses. The file I reviewed on Paul Shanley did not contain any allegations of sexual abuse. It is clear to me now that there was significant information about Father Shanley that I never saw. That should never have happened.

When I received the complaint that began our investigation I placed Fr. Shanley on administrative leave and eventually recommended Fr. Shanley never return to ministry.

I did see a letter in 1985 from a woman who complained about a talk Fr. Shanley gave that she found offensive because he seemed to advocate homosexual activity.

As I have reread that letter, I see a reference to sexual relations between an adult and a minor. I believed then and do now that sex between an adult and a minor is wrong and is also a crime. Sex between an adult and a child is never the fault of the child. It is always the adult who bears full responsibility for that horrible act. Why I did not focus on that reference in 1985, I don't know. I'm sorry I didn't. I wish I had.

**This week I met with the sister of a victim of abuse by a priest from the Archdiocese of Boston. She is still hurting over the abuse of her brother, who has since passed away. She wanted to know whether I saw or suspected anything about this priest--a priest who lived in the same rectory with me and two other priests during the late 1960's. I told her no, I never knew of any abuse, nor did I ever suspect it.**

**She asked me what can we do now? I understand her healing depends in part on her faith in God, and in part on her trusting that the Church will act to prevent future abuse.**

**Tonight I hope to provide her, other victims of abuse, and all members of the Church a view of what the Diocese will do to protect God's children.**

**Here's what I will do. My door is always open to victims. I have already met with several victims. I will meet with any others. I am personally committed to help anyone heal in any way I can.**

**In order to help victims, today I have asked Martha Van Oot, a respected attorney and civic leader, to develop an independent and voluntary mediation process for victims of child sexual abuse by priests. I have asked Attorney Van Oot to begin this work immediately.**

**Effective on February 15 of this year, I made public my decision not to assign a priest to pastoral ministry if the Diocese had a credible allegation about him regarding sexual misconduct with a minor.**

**As a Bishop and a Christian, I will continue to try to help priests who have committed abuse. I will pray for them. I will offer them professional assistance to gain control over their lives.**

**But, be clear-----I will not hide them.**

**Our Diocese will continue to cooperate fully with all civil authorities in the investigation of child sexual abuse by anyone. I understand the child protection laws of our State. We have always complied with these laws.**

**I will instruct all persons who work with victims of child sexual abuse in our Diocese to explain to adults who come forward about abuse in their past their option to report the abuse to the civil authorities and to support them if they choose to do so.**

**I believe our Diocese has a strong, effective and clear policy on sexual misconduct. I also believe that any policy can be improved. I will ask a group, including Catholics and non-Catholics, to examine our policies and procedures regarding sexual misconduct and to review decisions from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops meeting in Dallas in June.**

**Any policy is only as effective as its implementation.**

**This week we will have completed training 2,500 priests, religious and lay members of our parishes, schools and institutions on our pastoral response to reports of child abuse, and what steps to take to help prevent future abuse. We have regular training for new priests, employees and volunteers.**

**I have directed my staff to engage a recognized firm to conduct a thorough review of our record-keeping systems and make specific recommendations to me for improvement.**

**Tonight I ask that all people of every faith pray each day for victims of child sexual abuse and their families. On May 19-Pentecost Sunday--I will celebrate a *Mass of the Holy Spirit for Reparation and Healing* at Saint Joseph Cathedral at 10:30 a.m.**

**I will ask all parishes--through a similar Mass in their own churches--to join me in praying for forgiveness, healing and a resolve to prevent child sexual abuse in our Church.**

**I intend to meet personally with community leaders, people from our parishes, and other citizens of our State. I need to listen to your concerns and to hear how you think I can work to make New Hampshire safe for our children.**

**I encourage parents to talk frankly with their children about child sexual abuse. I will make available age appropriate materials to assist parents in talking about this difficult but sensitive issue with their children.**

**I ask all children and youth to share with adults and one another any concerns you have about your own safety. You are never wrong for telling someone that you are afraid of being harmed.**

**Our Church bears the wounds of the sexual abuse of children. We recognize that in order to help victims heal, we must first address our shortcomings. As Bishop, I am dedicating myself to making our Churches safe for children. I cannot do this alone.**

**Although the sin and crime of abuse may rest upon a small minority within our Church, the solution comes from a united effort by all of us. We are a hopeful Church and we are blessed with the strength of the many dedicated priests, deacons, religious and laity who toil everyday in the fields of the Lord.**

**Tonight let us unite not just in prayer, but in action. Let today be the day when we proclaim our faith by acknowledging our weakness and admitting our failures so we can create a community that truly reflects Christ's love of children and families.**

**[Home](#) | [About the Diocese](#) | [Schools](#) | [Vocations](#) | [News](#)**

**Ministries and Services | Parishes and Missions | Office of Public Policy | Directory**

---

Copyright © 2001-2002 Diocese of Manchester  
153 Ash Street, P.O. Box 310, Manchester, NH 03105-0310  
(603) 669-3100; Fax: (603) 669-0377  
Read our Internet Policy  
Email: Webmaster