

PASTORAL STATEMENT ON SEXUAL ABUSE CASES

Over the past five years, the Diocese of San Diego has been responding to people claiming sexual abuse by priests and others in the Church. To this time, pastoral resolution has been accomplished with 43 individuals, of which 18 accepted professional counseling and 30 received financial compensation.

There are currently 143 people who have filed lawsuits against the diocese. To date, settlement negotiations with them have, unfortunately, been unsuccessful. While we are prepared to continue negotiations and would hope that they would be successful, we have to consider our alternative if they are not.

We are painfully aware of the harm that the victims of abuse have suffered, and we want to treat all of them fairly and equitably. At the same time, good stewardship demands that settlements not cripple the ability of the Church to accomplish its mission and ministries. Consequently, we must consider how best to fairly compensate the victims while at the same time not jeopardizing our overall mission. If this cannot be done through settlement negotiations, the diocese may be forced to file a Chapter 11 reorganization in bankruptcy court.

To the Abused and Their Families

First and foremost, I want to speak to all of you who have suffered from abuse in the Church, and I want to say again what I expressed to those of you who were willing to meet personally with me: I am profoundly sorry for this betrayal of trust in your lives. On behalf of those who caused you pain, and in the name of the Church, I beg your forgiveness. Please continue to seek healing and reconciliation, and know that I stand ready to meet with any of you who might find this helpful.

To Priests in the Diocese

We have been ordained for the awesome responsibility of shepherding God's people entrusted to our care. Consequently, all of us have been horrified by the fact that some shepherds over the years have abused "the lambs."

Coming to grips with the devastating consequences of abuse in the lives of victims and their families, we can appreciate the reaction of Pope John Paul II, that "there is no room in the priesthood for those who would abuse children."

While only a few from among us have been guilty of abuse, all of us have suffered the shame. We should not become bitter, we must become better, better shepherds after the manner of the Good Shepherd. I know, as you do, the deep appreciation of our people for all of us who are laying down our lives for the sheep.

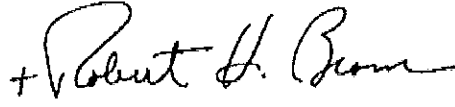
To All of the Faithful

These have been trying times for you as well. Many of you have expressed the embarrassment you have felt. I am very sorry for what you have had to endure, and am deeply grateful that you are remaining faithful.

Your priests need you now more than ever and your commitment to work together to accomplish the mission given by Jesus to us all.

Please join me in prayer for the victims of abuse and their families. Let us pray, as well, for the offenders that they will be forgiven their sins and know God's mercy.

For all of us, the tragedy of sexual abuse in the Church should not leave us without hope. Conformed to Christ in his passion and death, may we be evermore transformed by the power of his resurrection.

Signed: 
Bishop of San Diego

February 21, 2007
Ash Wednesday