

Diocesan Statement – SNAP Press Conference October 18, 2007

The Diocese of Jackson is home to over 48,000 Catholics in 105 parishes and missions. The diocese covers 65 counties and almost 38,000 square miles making it the largest geographical diocese east of the Mississippi River. Beginning in the mid 1980s, the Diocese of Jackson developed and adopted a written policy addressing sexual abuse of minors by church personnel. The policy was updated in 1994 and a diocesan review board was established at that time as well. The Dallas Charter was adopted in June 2002 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, but the “norms” or procedures for implementing the Charter were not approved until December of 2002 and training concerning the Charter occurred throughout 2003. In 2002 and 2003, the diocesan policy was modified to incorporate the Dallas Charter and its norms. During 2002-2003, the diocese worked diligently to implement the Charter and its procedures. The diocese developed the “Protection of Children” policy and a “Safe Environment” program. Training sessions were held on the diocesan and parish levels for all employees and significant volunteers who work with children and youth. Review for staff and volunteers and training for new staff and volunteers continue on an annual basis on the diocesan and parish levels. Criminal background checks were and continue to be conducted on all church personnel including clergy and religious and significant volunteers who work with children and youth.

The Diocese of Jackson’s policy is to remove priests from active ministry if it receives a credible allegation of abuse. As recently as December of last year, the Diocese received a report of an allegation of abuse and even though the claim was over forty years old, it promptly removed the priest from ministry and went public with its removal.

The Diocese of Jackson does not allow priests who have been accused of credible allegations of abuse to transfer into the Diocese from other dioceses or orders. To its knowledge, no priests are currently serving the Diocese with credible allegations of abuse.

The Diocese of Jackson was audited in October 2003 and was found to be in compliance with the Charter. At this time, the auditors commended the diocese for its proactive stance and its efforts to abide by the Charter and the norms. In 2004, 2005 and 2007, the diocese was audited again and was found to be in compliance with the Charter. The diocese is committed to protecting children. Sexual misconduct by church personnel violates human dignity and the mission of the Church. The Diocese of Jackson is committed to ensuring that children being served by the Church are not at risk of sexual abuse by Church personnel. The spiritual well-being of all victims, their families, and others in the community is of particular concern to the Church. For more information about these policies and the procedures, we encourage you to visit the diocesan website at “www.jacksondiocese.org” and click on “Protecting God’s Children.”

The Diocese urges anyone who has been a victim of abuse by church personnel, who has not yet reported the abuse, to come forward and do so. Our victims’ assistance coordinator, Linda Raff, a licensed social worker, is available to assist in making a report. Mrs. Raff’s telephone number is 601-355-8634, ext. 728. For more information about Diocesan policies and procedures, you can visit our diocesan website at www.jacksondiocese.org.