

Statement of the  
**Catholic Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph**

concerning

Civil Lawsuit Alleging Abuse by Retired Bishop Joseph Hart and Thomas J. O'Brien

**(Kansas City, MO / Nov. 3, 2011)** The Catholic Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph was informed today by media of the filing of a civil lawsuit by Gilbert Padilla alleging that he was sexually abused 35 years ago by Retired Bishop Joseph Hart and Thomas J. O'Brien.

**Regarding Retired Bishop Hart**

The diocese can confirm that Father Joseph Hart was ordained in 1956, served in five parishes of the diocese, and was ordained Bishop of Cheyenne in 1976.

In 1989 and 1992, the diocese received two separate complaints alleging that Bishop Hart inappropriately touched two individuals in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although Bishop Hart denied these statements, he asked the diocese to address the complaints in accordance with local policies and procedures. In addition to undergoing an in-patient psychiatric evaluation, Bishop Hart agreed that all of the information about these complaints should be reported to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Papal Nuncio. The psychiatric evaluation advised that, Bishop Hart does not appear to be a threat to himself or others on any level. Bishop Hart returned to ministry in Wyoming and retired in 2001.

In retirement, Bishop Hart faced other accusations. A 2002 investigation by Wyoming law enforcement cleared him of a report of sexual misconduct with a Cheyenne-area youth in the late 1970s.

**Regarding Thomas O'Brien**

Thomas O'Brien was ordained in 1950 and served in six parishes. In late 1983, the diocese received a complaint accusing O'Brien of sexual misconduct. O'Brien's file contains four subsequent similar complaints from this time period. Although O'Brien denied the allegation, Bishop John J. Sullivan removed him from parish ministry and required him to undergo in-patient

psychiatric evaluation and treatment. Bishop Sullivan retired in 1993 and died in 2001.

After O'Brien completed in-patient treatment, he returned to the diocese in 1984. In consultation with his therapists, O'Brien was permitted to serve as a hospital chaplain at St. Joseph Health Center. He continued as a part-time chaplain until 2002.

In 2002, the U.S. Bishops adopted the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. At that time, Bishop Raymond J. Boland took additional precautions and informed O'Brien that he could not present himself as a priest and was permanently barred from any form of ministry.

### **Reporting Suspicious or Inappropriate Behavior or Sexual Misconduct**

The diocese has made it known that it will respond to all reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior or sexual misconduct. Any person who has a reason to believe that a child is in danger should make a report to local law enforcement or the Missouri Division of Family Services Child Abuse Hotline, at (800) 392-3738.

The diocese also offers the services of an Ombudsman to receive and investigate reports of inappropriate behavior or sexual misconduct by clergy, employees, or volunteers in diocesan, parish or school programs. To make a confidential report, contact Jenifer Valenti, at (816) 812-2500, or by email to [JeniferValenti@att.net](mailto:JeniferValenti@att.net).

Through the [Ombudsman](#) and a [VictimsqAdvocate](#), the diocese has demonstrated concern for people who believe that they were harmed in a church setting. The purpose of these initiatives is to ensure that each complaint is investigated thoroughly and that each person alleging abuse receives counseling and resources for healing.

Over the past ten years, the diocese has reached more than 22,000 adults through a community outreach program designed to teach the warning signs of abuse. Annually, more than 15,000 children and youth receive age-appropriate personal safety training in school and parish programs.

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