



Statement of the Most Rev. R Daniel Conlon, Bishop of Joliet
Re: The announcement of a settlement involving a sex abuse case
March 12, 2013

I came to the Diocese of Joliet 19 months ago with the same excitement and optimism that any pastor has when he accepts the care of a new flock. Unfortunately the dark cloud of the history of child abuse in this diocese has imposed itself almost every day. The abuse itself and the way it was handled in many cases have created serious harm to the lives of individuals, parish communities and the whole diocese.

Although I was not present during the unfolding of this history, I feel a deep concern for the victims/survivors of abuse and their families. Their pain does not go away with the changing of bishops. I reiterate my willingness to meet with them and the diocese's readiness to provide counseling through our Victims' Assistance Coordinator.

This statement is provided today because the diocese's settlement agreement with plaintiff David Rudofski regarding his allegation against Fr. James Burnett has become final. The lawsuit was filed several years ago.

The settlement terms include a statement from me acknowledging that allegations of child sexual abuse against Fr. Burnett made by Mr. Rudofski, Mr. Dan Shanahan and a man who did not want his name disclosed are considered substantiated. In addition, there is a payment of financial compensation to Mr. Rudofski.

The settlement also includes compliance by the diocese with a judge's order lifting a protective order for specific pages of the personnel files of 15 priest-offenders and other related specified documents, allowing them to be released voluntarily by the plaintiff. I hope that the conclusion of this case will bring some measure of comfort and closure to Mr. Rudofski.

Even with the volume of material now available through the release of these records, much of the content was previously reported by the media. Nevertheless, I realize the details that may be revealed are likely to open old wounds. I regret the pain that this information will cause victims/survivors, since many of them will vividly recall what they endured as if it happened yesterday.

The tragic history of child abuse in the Diocese of Joliet has unfolded publicly over a long period. No human action, really, can fix the past. My focus is on the future, trying to do everything in my power to assure that the children of this diocese are safe.

A new, fulltime position of Director of Child and Youth Protection was created a year ago, our diocesan policy on child abuse and protection has been carefully updated, and we are much more sensitive to boundary violations, that may stop short of abuse, but can nevertheless raise serious concerns.

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Allegations of abuse are taken seriously. All are reported to civil authorities and followed up on internally. Those accused credibly of criminal behavior are removed from public ministry until the matter is resolved according to established procedure. No cleric is returned to ministry if that procedure determines that the allegation is substantiated. Our Review Board, comprised mostly of lay professionals, is involved in every step.

With the conclusion of Mr. Rudofski's case, the diocese is updating its website list of priests who have substantiated allegations of the sexual abuse of minors, or who have been credibly accused but whose cases are still pending in the canonical process. No cleric of the Diocese of Joliet with a credible or substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor is engaged in public ministry.

Dealing with the tragic history of child abuse is part of a pastor's ministry today. As pastor of the Diocese of Joliet, I pray every day for those who have been abused and for those responsible for it. I ask the Lord for healing for all His people who suffer for what has happened in their midst. With God's help, and the cooperation of those who work with me, I will do my best to assure a better future.

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