

INDEPENDENT BOARD OF INQUIRY
Regarding St. Anthony's Seminary
P.O. Box 1065
Santa Barbara, California 93102

Presentation of Board's Report

I'm Geoffrey Stearns, Chairperson of the Board.

With me are my fellow board members: Kathleen Baggarley, Keith Mar and Ray Higgins. Our out-of-town members, Father Dismas Bonner and Eugene Merlin were not able to be here because of the demands of their respective professional commitments and schedules.

The purpose of our meeting is to present to you the final report of the Independent Board of Inquiry Regarding St. Anthony's Seminary; to highlight some of its key portions; and to make copies of it available for distribution. Before beginning a discussion of the report's content, I'd ask you to bear with me while I attempt to create a context for it.

As most of you know, our Board was convened by the Franciscan Province in January of this year, when we met with Father Chinnici to receive background and briefing about the problem of sexual abuse at the seminary, as it was then understood. I don't think any board member could anticipate the magnitude and importance of the task that lay ahead.

I do think we shared a sincere willingness to do whatever we could to find out the truth and report it, to help as many victims as possible, and to come up with

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sound ideas to try to prevent a tragedy like this from reoccurring in the future. At this point, I would like to acknowledge and appreciate my board colleagues for their dedication, professionalism, intelligence, humanity, humor and good-will. I am extremely proud to have been part of a group of this caliber, and am grateful for an opportunity to experience firsthand what I truly believe we have achieved -- a comprehensive and effective pastoral response to an extremely confusing and painful situation.

Once you have had an opportunity to review the report, I believe most of you will find it to be a serious and thoughtful document -- one that is accessible to the reader, thorough and sensitive in its approach to very troubling subject matter, and helpful to those among both the clergy and the laity who wish to continue to proactively address the issue of clerical sexual abuse. Ultimately, our hope is that the report will help promote healing for all concerned.

As you might expect, the majority of our report is devoted to our Findings and Recommendations. The findings section discusses the nature and extent of the abuse; its effects on victims, families and the community; and the dispositions of offending friars. It was written to convey the true nature and extent of the abuse, while preserving

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the security, and sense of security of those victims who came forward and spoke in reliance on our pledge of confidentiality. No names or other information that could lead to identification of a victim were included. We had no authority to release offenders' names; that decision lies with the Province and the offenders themselves. However, we also do believe that in some cases, disclosure of offenders' names would lead to identification of a victims. In the couple of instances where victims' experiences are set forth verbatim, we were careful to obtain their informed written releases.

Turning to the findings themselves, we found that in the years in question (1964 - 1987), a serious problem of sexual abuse of minors by friars existed at the seminary. We have identified eleven friars as perpetrators of sexual abuse; a twelfth friar was identified as probably having engaged in pre-abusive conduct, sometimes referred to as "grooming".

Of the students who have thus far come forward as a result of the Board's outreach effort, thirty four were identified as victims of sexual abuse, and one additional student as the object of "grooming" by a friar. One of the friars had seven known victims; another friar had eighteen known victims; the other friars had either two victims or one victim. Without going into graphic detail now, I will

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indicate that the report describes a wide range of serious sexually abusive behaviors perpetrated under a variety of circumstances, spread among the friars in a somewhat even fashion.

With respect to the disposition of offenders, first of all, I want to state that no offending friar is either assigned to ministry or placed in Santa Barbara County. Further, I believe that we have forged an ongoing, collaborative process with Father Chinnicci to assist him in making dispositions that are safe and secure, and solidly based on the recommendations of experienced sex-offender evaluators.

Of the twelve identified friars, one is deceased; one was criminally prosecuted and left the order; one left the order before final profession; and as to a fourth friar, who is suspected of grooming, more information is being awaited before a final disposition is completed.

Of the remaining eight friars, seven have been sent by the Province to highly respected professionals, experienced in working with sexual offenders and recommended by this Board, where they are currently in various stages of assessment and treatment. The eighth was evaluated by a forensic sex offender evaluator agreed upon by himself and the Provincial Minister. These eight friars are either

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restricted from ministry and contact with minors pending completion of evaluation or have such restrictions in place as were recommended by their evaluation and/or treatment professionals.

It must be emphasized that oversight of the offenders is an ongoing process. The permanent board will know who and where these friars are, and will continue to work with the Provincial Minister to modify or refine any given disposition as new information surfaces or therapy progresses.

Similarly, in other ways this report marks the end of one phase and the beginning of the next. We have set forth a comprehensive set of recommendations concerning:

(1) prevention of further abuse through screening, training, formulation of guidelines and provision of support for friars; (2) methods of dealing with both known, and any newly reported offenders in a timely and effective manner; (3) ongoing pastoral response to, and support of victims and families; (4) a proactive stance for the Province towards laity in general, e.g., through ongoing education and other prevention work; and (5) the scope and functions of the permanent board, referred to as the Independent Response Team, which will operate on a Province-wide basis.

We are gratified by the number of victims and family members whom we have been able to help by providing the

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therapy they need and deserve. We believe there will be other victims that will come forward when they are ready and able, and that they will be assisted by a permanent board with effective and sensible processes, implemented in a caring and humane way.

We want to express our appreciation to Father Chinnici and the Province for their dedication to this painful and necessary task and for their support of our work. We wish to convey to the victims and their families our deepest admiration and respect. We thank the Greater Community for its support and valuable input along the way. And lastly, we would like to leave you with our belief that a process has been created and set in motion that has worked, is working, and will continue to work; and thus is worthy and deserving of the trust and support all of concerned.

GEOFFREY STEARNS
Chairperson