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**DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER RESPONDS TO
REPORTS OF THE NATIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

(MANCHESTER, NH) The National Review Board of the U.S. Bishops Conference today released two landmark reports regarding the crisis of the sexual abuse of minors by some Catholic clergy in the United States. Both reports were commissioned by the lay National Review Board with the authorization of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) as part of the ongoing commitment to ensure the safety of children and young people in the Church and to restore trust in church leaders. The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which included a mandate for these studies, was adopted by the USCCB in June 2002 at which time the National Review Board was created.

The John Jay College Study

The John Jay College Study is a descriptive study of the nature and scope of the problem of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in the United States. This unprecedented social science research project used the expertise of forensic psychology, criminology and human behavior to quantify the frequency of reports of the sexual abuse of minors to dioceses from 1950-2002. The Study focuses on the prevalence of allegations of child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, a timeline of when reports were made and when the abuse occurred (which often were separated by decades), and the financial cost resulting from these reports. The national data gathered from Catholic dioceses in the United States, including the Diocese of Manchester, enabled John Jay College to present statistical profiles of priests who have been accused and of survivors, the characteristics of the reported offenses and the action taken by church and civil officials to such reports.

The national statistical results confirm that the horror of child sexual abuse by some Catholic clergy in the past, especially in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, was worse than anyone imagined just two years ago. The analysis in the report confirms that the most recent outreach by the Church to adult survivors of child sexual abuse by some priests resulted in an unprecedented number of reports of abuse to local dioceses and law enforcement officials since January 2002.

On the local level, the Diocese of Manchester has taken significant steps to assist adult survivors of child sexual abuse by priests. The Diocese has disclosed the number of incidents reported to church officials over the last two years while preserving the identity of survivors. The 2003 Stewardship and Financial Report of the Diocese states that it responded to 227 requests for pastoral assistance received through December 1, 2003, and paid a total of 20.25 million dollars to survivors. The vast majority, 207 requests, were received over the nearly 2½ years between July 1, 2001 and December 1, 2003, and report abuse that peaked in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

The courageous step forward by every person who was harmed in the past is the first in a journey that leads them and the Church to healing by the Lord. All of the Catholic faithful should continue to pray and work for healing in the lives of adult survivors of child sexual abuse.

The Diocese of Manchester also reported the name and number of priests accused of the sexual abuse of minors beginning in February 2002. A December 10, 2002 report noted that 52 priests of the Diocese of Manchester and 3 priests from other dioceses who were present in New Hampshire were accused of sexually assaulting minors from 1943 – 2002. Twenty-two of the priests accused were deceased at the time the report was made to the Diocese.

While 6% of diocesan priests in New Hampshire have been reported to have harmed children in the past, it is important to remember that 94% of priests have served the people of God faithfully. The call by Attorney Robert Bennett and Bishop Wilton Gregory for the Christian faithful to support and affirm their parish priests is an opportunity for all Catholics to reach out to those who have served them faithfully, kindly and generously.

The National Review Board Report

The National Review Board Report is a narrative report of the cause and context of the problem of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in the United States. This Report relies on materials from interviews of certain church and civil leaders as well as various experts in theology, canon law, medicine, psychology, and civil law. Bishop McCormack was interviewed by those who prepared the Report. The Report also consulted a variety of articles and studies, including the empirical data gathered in the John Jay College Study, to form the opinions

expressed in the Report. The National Review Board has called for further analytical study of the public health crisis of child sexual abuse as a necessary next step.

The Report sought findings to two fundamental questions. “First, why did individuals with a disposition to prey sexually upon minors gain admission to the priesthood? Second, how did they manage to remain in the priesthood even after allegations and evidence of such abuse became known to their bishops and other church leaders?”

As to the first question, the Report expresses the mindset of the Review Board with respect to the selection and formation of candidates for the priesthood with particular attention to the issues of human sexual orientation, the sacred discipline of celibacy and the development of one’s spiritual life. Conclusions reached by the Review Board in response to the second question led them to point out a number of shortcomings on the part of some bishops and church officials which resulted in the ongoing presence of men who had sexually abused minors within the ranks of the Catholic clergy.

The Report concludes with several recommendations based on the findings and opinions of the National Review Board and their historical review. Examples of how these recommendations can be helpful at a national level is shown in the experience of the Church in New Hampshire to date.

1. Enhanced screening, formation and oversight of candidates for the priesthood

The Diocese of Manchester continues to enhance the screening, formation and supervision of men who are studying for service as priests in New Hampshire. Psychological evaluations have been in place for many years and are being further refined in light of the experience of the Church these last two years.

Bishop McCormack’s recent addition of two lay women to the diocesan Vocations Board, which evaluates candidates and makes recommendations to the Bishop for priestly ordination, is an example of both broader consultation and the opportunity for greater scrutiny. Good screening and evaluation requires constant review and refinement, and the Church in New Hampshire is committed to this work.

2. Increased sensitivity in responding to reports of the sexual abuse of minors

The sensitivity of the Church in New Hampshire to adult survivors is not only expressed in the overwhelming response to offers by the Diocese to be of assistance, but also in the resolve of the countless people engaged in ministry to adult survivors. The pastoral care by many priests, deacons, religious and laity in the parishes and schools of the Diocese is matched by the personal attention given to survivors by Bishop McCormack. The timely resolution of requests for financial settlements without contentious legal argumentation has paved the way for rebuilding a trusting relationship between survivors and the Church. The model developed in New Hampshire has been sought after by attorneys for dioceses and survivors from other parts of the country.

N.H. Catholic Charities counselors, the Bethany support groups for adult survivors and the fine work of Mr. Joseph P. Naff, LICSW, the Director of Healing and Pastoral Care, have also become resources for other dioceses across the nation. Assisting survivors to select a counselor of their choice and gathering them for a day of wholeness and spirituality have been well received by many.

The work of building relationships of trust, hope and confidence will take a long time, but the people of New Hampshire should be inspired by the courage of every adult survivor, knowing that, with the Lord, we can do great things.

3. Greater accountability of bishops and Church officials

Accountability is best measured by how well we learn from the past and in our zealous commitment to shaping a trustworthy and hopeful future. In 1998, Bishop McCormack called for the establishment of a lay Diocesan Review Board and the review of the diocesan policies in place at the time. The participation of the Diocese of Manchester in the development of the *Protecting God's Children* safe environment program allowed New Hampshire Catholics to benefit from such training well before the program was launched nationally in 2002.

There are also other recent examples of accountability in New Hampshire. Most notable of these is Bishop McCormack's personal presence to parishioners across the State over the last

two years and his desire to work through this painful chapter in the life of the presbyterate with the priests of New Hampshire. Bishop McCormack is also concluding the pilot phase of a parish visitation plan in which he spends an entire day with the people of each parish in the Diocese. The pastoral visit of the Bishop to a parish is an occasion for building relationships through prayer, dialogue and sharing about the mission and ministry of the Church in New Hampshire.

4. Improved interaction with civil authorities

The working relationship with civil authorities, especially in light of the Agreement reached between the Diocese and the State, is rooted in a firm commitment by the Church to report every accusation of the sexual abuse of a minor by any church personnel, regardless of the age of the person who may have been harmed. Furthermore, dialogue between the Diocese and human service agencies, public and private, has further developed the cooperative network of people who seek to prevent child abuse in any form.

5. Greater participation by the laity in the life of the Church

Bishop McCormack's commitment to working with the diocesan Pastoral and Finance Councils, the Council of Priests, the Diocesan Review Board and other consultative groups has made the pastoral mission of the Church in New Hampshire a responsibility of the entire Catholic faithful. The Bishop has also expanded his staff to include more laity with expertise in pastoral ministry and other areas of expertise that assist the Church.

Bishop McCormack also established a lay Task Force on Sexual Misconduct Policy. He approved 100% of their recommendations that focused on the broadening of the work to promote a safe environment, to respond pastorally to survivors and to be leaders in the prevention of child sexual abuse in the Church and society. The Bishop has also demonstrated his desire to listen to all the Catholic faithful through listening sessions in parishes and with priests. A new diocesan Safe Environment Council and Safe Environment Coordinators will provide opportunities for more laity to be actively engaged in promoting a safe environment in our Church.