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Letter of Cardinal George to Parishioners February 8, 2006

February 8, 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As you know, in June 2002, the U.S. bishops promised that victims of sexual abuse would be attended to; that priests who were shown to have ever abused a minor, even once, would be permanently removed from public ministry if not from the priesthood; and that programs would be set up to protect young people from harm. The Archdiocese had started on all of this long before 2002, but new initiatives were begun for training all adults to protect children and the processes to examine allegations were reviewed and strengthened. Records were re-examined to be sure that all priests ever accused of any such sinful activity were not in ministry. The Archdiocese has had a deservedly good reputation in responding to this crisis. It has conformed to national standards and to audits. It has reported, for many years, to the civil authorities every allegation it has received. Many fine and dedicated people have cared for victims and reviewed cases. In particular, we should all be proud of the Victims' Assistance Ministry, the Independent Review Board and the Professional Fitness Office. These people's work has been conscientiously and professionally done.

The case of Father Daniel McCormack undermines all this now. When an accusation of sexual abuse of a minor is made against a priest, the Professional Fitness Review Administrator receives it from the accuser, reports it to the civil authorities and presents it to the Independent Review Board for their consideration. During this first investigation, the priest accused is told of the allegation, his ministry is restricted, he is given a monitor and asked if he has a defense against the accusation. If the Board decides, after their preliminary, but careful, consideration of the accusation, that there is reasonable cause to suspect something happened, I remove the priest from ministry, the various parishes at which he served are notified, any other victims are asked to come forward, the investigation is completed and the case is sent to the Holy See for permission to remove the priest from public ministry. This process did not occur in the case of Father McCormack.

Father McCormack was not in any sense "protected" from the civil authorities by the Archdiocese of Chicago. Before any allegation came to the Archdiocese, he was arrested by the police, questioned and let go. When I learned of his arrest three days after it occurred, I restricted his ministry while we waited for an allegation to begin the process of investigation. It now seems that additional information was available that did not reach our offices. The process we have used well to remove predators was not engaged quickly enough.

I must apologize to all of you for the great embarrassment every Catholic must now feel in the light of media scrutiny of these events. In particular, I am deeply sorry for the pain of those Catholics who are part of St. Agatha's Parish. They were especially in my prayers on February 5, their feast day. I pray as well for those who have brought these allegations against Father McCormack. He and his family also warrant inclusion in our prayers.

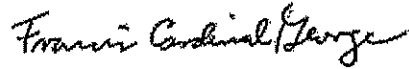
To be sure that the protection of children remains paramount, we will continue to examine what happened with the help of experts not connected to the Archdiocese of Chicago. We will work to be more immediately responsive and to move cases along more quickly. We'll have to be sure that all information from any source gets to the Archdiocesan offices and is more widely shared, with the civil authorities as usual, but also with others. A case ordinarily begins with a call to the Archdiocesan hotline for sexual abuse reporting (312-751-5205), and we will check on how we might improve that service.

All of this is necessary; none of it will of itself remove the pain of the moment. We can only pray that



pain will be redemptive in this case and that the Lord will heal us. I pray that a failure to act more quickly on my part will not harm the Archdiocese itself. You are in my prayers; please keep me in yours. God bless you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.

Archbishop of Chicago

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