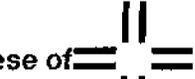


Diocese of   
**Belleville**  
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Friday, February 22, 2002

MEMORANDUM

To: †Wilton D. Gregory  
Bishop of Belleville  
President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

From: David Spotanski   
Vice Chancellor/Assistant to the Bishop

Re: *Breaking the Cardinal Law: A Catholic Parent's Response to Your February 19 Statement on Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests (revised 4/02)*

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Every evening when I arrive home from the chancery, my kids race to the door vying to be the first to declare, "*I missed you most!*" Once we've established which of the three has taken the day's honors, I try to always stop for a moment to consider whether I've left our Church better for them than I found it that day or worse. For over fifteen years I've been able to answer that question honestly, confidently, and with the satisfaction of knowing I'd played some small part in building the Church in which my children will one day raise my grandchildren. Too many nights recently, though, I've awakened at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and agonized over that question. Is it enough to do my job, to take care of the business of the day and keep quiet about things I know are already sources of anguish for you, or am I somehow complicit by not speaking out? Too many nights I wake up and wonder if an institution that can be this insensitive to the physical, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing of its most precious members – its very future – is even worthy of my three children's innocent faith.

You went out on a limb, Wilton, as Bishop O'Donnell had in the Archdiocese of St. Louis before you, when you placed a lay person in a traditionally clerical job. I went out on a limb when I accepted it. I have happily tagged along as you've restored faith, hope and pride in the traumatized families of the Diocese of Belleville, and I never balk at an opportunity to share with people that you exude the same pastoral presence away from the crowds and the cameras as you do before them. For whatever reason I have found myself in a special place at a unique and difficult time in the Church, and I do not take that lightly. I have been blessed with the freedom (and, I believe, the obligation) to share daily with the President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops a perspective to which he cannot relate. I can speak as a parent.

You should know by now that our children are more important to Sharon and me than anything in the world. Let me repeat that in bold Italics: *Our children are more important to Sharon and me than anything in the world.* With all due respect, though you probably come as close to understanding the significance of that statement as any bishop in the Church, you don't. You can't. No priest, no religious, no lay person who is not a parent can truly appreciate the incredible weight of that single sentence any more than I could before Erin was born. Three children later, I'm not sure I fully grasp it yet, and I know I can't adequately articulate it for you in a simple memorandum. Similarly, I could never hope to fully comprehend how your pastoral ministry is the most important thing in the world

to you. I can witness your vocation and try to appreciate the extraordinary commitment you have made to the Church, but I am not and will likely never be a priest. I may work in your chancery, but I am, above all else, Sharon's husband and Erin, Jonathan, and James' dad.

As such, just as you are deeply wounded and even angered when I make a comment you believe is not supportive of a Church position or one of Her pillars, so too am I wounded and angered when the Church we both love (and to Whom we have both, in distinctly different degrees, dedicated our working lives) chooses to disregard the wellbeing of Her children – my children – to protect Her own icons and Her image.

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That said, I believe your February 19 *Statement on Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests* is sincere and from your heart. I believe that you want to believe that deep down every bishop shares your commitment to saving children rather than saving face. In truth, though, you don't have to look far to see that that has not been and likely still is not the case. In fact, taken in light of revelations across the country in the past several weeks (without which your statement would never have been issued), you need to know that your remarks said little to ease the minds of shocked Catholic parents like me.

A cursory look at your text reveals that, for all the time and effort the Conference has spent on this issue in the past twenty years, no one, including the President, has the authority to require an individual bishop to comply with a single USCCB policy. As much as I believe you sincerely wish it could have, your statement offered no guarantees, no tangible action steps, and no consolidated resolve to amend. While I applaud your honesty in not promising more than you could deliver, what you did (and I expect the media will be swift to point this out) was nuance the realities that keep our – sorry, *my* – children at risk. For example:

- The Conference can only “*encourage*” the development of sexual abuse policies in dioceses, which truthfully carries no more weight than if *I* encourage them. The USCCB currently has absolutely no authority to mandate, enforce, or otherwise monitor their use or effectiveness in local dioceses.
- Seminaries can only “*attempt*” to weed out unhealthy candidates. Some are more diligent than others, of course, but in how many cases do bishops or rectors accept questionable prospects (or allow them to continue) rather than risk losing precious potential priests or revenue? How can the Conference ever say it’s “*doing everything* to ensure that we have worthy and healthy candidates for the priesthood”? Unsubstantiated absolutes and superlatives don’t even work in toothpaste ads anymore; they certainly have no place in a statement issued in response to a national tragedy.
- How can parishes and schools “*ensure safe environments*” when their local bishops are free to arbitrarily choose whether or not to inform them that their parish priest has a penchant for sodomizing children? You simply can’t withhold information like that and then put the impetus for ensuring safety on local lay leadership.
- Indeed, some bishops, yourself included, have reached out to victims and others affected by this “*outrageous behavior*,” but how many and how well? More to the point, how many have not? Is anyone keeping track?

In short, Wilton, the truth is that our bishops are not doing all they *can* to stop sexual abuse of minors by their brother priests; they’re each doing all they *care to*. Like most Catholics I’m stunned and horrified that there’s a distinction, but after the disclosures of the past few weeks you can’t deny there still is. For a Church that can be so outspoken and uncompromising about the splinters in the eyes of our culture, She has apparently for decades hypocritically concealed a plank in Her own eye from which one could hew an ark.

I'm sincerely glad your February 19 *Statement* made reference to the thousands and thousands of good, committed, faithful priests out there, because they need and deserve our support now more than ever. It's just tragic that, because of certain members of the hierarchy, the people in the pews can't be completely confident their particular parish priest is among them. Or their bishop, for that matter. As long as a single Ordinary is willing to lie bold-faced to his diocese, every priest's credibility is in question. Even yours.

I look forward to the day when the same conscience that wouldn't permit you to sign off on a flawed draft statement that promised too much also drives you to ask your brother bishops here and in Rome to amend the flawed processes that made it so. You can issue gracious statements after the fact until there's not a tree left in the forest, but until someone holds the bishops' collective feet to the fire, you've done precious little but make yourself feel better. The bishops and cardinals who've chosen not to comply with the USCCB's recommendations thumb their noses at you, at the Conference, and at the families under their shoddy pastoral care with virtually no fear of reprisal beyond a few weeks of bad press and some astronomical legal bills that those same families ultimately end up paying. Powerless, the Conference and the Apostolic Nuncio have looked the other way, in some cases even issuing self-damning statements of support to which the offending bishops have been quick to refer.

For these policies to have any teeth (I presume that is your intention), failure to comply after twenty years should result in severe penalties, not expressions of fraternal esteem. At the very least, those bishops suspected of sheltering and protecting abusers instead of children should be removed from their Sees until their fitness for ministry is reviewed by the same sort of objective review board that should exist by now in every diocese but doesn't. Of course, with no hard data on which dioceses have done any sort of analysis of their clergy files, that could result in a lot of at least temporarily vacant Sees.

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Using the situation in the Archdiocese of Boston as a chilling example, Bernard Cardinal Law, having admitted to reassigning and covering for priests he knew to be pedophiles, has said publicly that he has no intention of resigning his See in disgrace. How on earth can that be *his* decision, particularly when he has so clearly demonstrated a basic inability or unwillingness to discern right from wrong? In what other profession (indeed, in what other *Profession of Faith*) is such reprehensible behavior not grounds for immediate dismissal? Couldn't one reasonably expect the Catholic Church's standards to be higher than the norm rather than lower?

The Cardinal says his role in the Archdiocese is not that of CEO but "a role of a pastor, a role of a teacher, a role of a father." I've never been a pastor or a teacher, but I can assure you his behavior is not that of a caring father. Moving offenders and paying for silence, lying about his actions and his inaction, shifting blame and apologizing only under the glare of media spotlights – those aren't missteps or errors in judgment, and they're not accidents or oversights; they're the behaviors of an accomplice. They are crimes and they are sins and they are committed by choice and with malice aforethought. They are decidedly premeditated and, to a real father, they are as horrible as the acts themselves. If Law's conduct is acceptable for a Catholic pastor, I suggest the role of pastor needs to be redefined. To equate this man with a teacher is to disparage the most honorable of professions. If Law were a CEO, at least he'd be culpable to his Board, his shareholders, and some sort of regulatory or oversight commission. This man knowingly, willingly put children just like mine in harm's way, yet he is apparently accountable to no one in this life. To the deep dismay of all Catholic parents who are trying to teach their children the importance of accepting responsibility for their actions, Law's sole superior in Rome hasn't even publicly acknowledged his deceit.

One of the Cardinal's eloquently misguided responses to early calls for his resignation was that faith does not "rest on the shifting winds of public opinion." Does Law believe our outrage at clerical molestation of minors and those who permit it can be waited out like a passing thunderstorm? Could he be more out of touch and, God help us, is his attitude typical of the episcopacy? In Luke's Gospel (16:10), Jesus says clearly, "*Whoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in large ones; whoever is dishonest in small matters will be dishonest in large ones.*" What might Jesus say of a man who has shown himself to be dishonest about his knowledge of the forcible anal rape of children? Perhaps the Cardinal intends to ride out Christ's opinion as well. As one of the bishops with whom I worked in the Archdiocese of St. Louis used to say, "I don't think I'd like hell very much."

Cardinal Law was quoted in his own archdiocesan newspaper this way: "What I have come to learn with a much more vivid clarity during these past weeks is that our singular focus must be the protection of children." One might extrapolate that his singular focus as recently as a month ago was not the protection of children, but the protection of a grossly inflated self-image of the Church and of the priesthood. Naively noble, maybe, but sickly, deeply flawed beyond measure. Where was Law during the two decades the Conference was "*encouraging*" the bishops to address these issues justly and pastorally, after the rest of society and the Church had realized that the tendency to sexually brutalize young people doesn't typically go away with a few weeks of counseling and a change of address? Where was each of our 370 bishops, and how do we know they've chosen to comply with the USCCB recommendations? Who, besides the media, has made any attempt to monitor their responses to these matters, and what recourse is available to those whose cries for help are ignored? How many dioceses actually have functional review boards to investigate allegations of abuse and recommend fitness for ministry? How many have policies that are diligently enforced? And for God's sake (literally, *for God's sake*), why would a bishop with any conscience at all have a policy regarding sexual abuse of young people by his priests and deliberately not enforce it?

As I tell my children when I ask why they've done something they knew was wrong, "*I don't know*" is not an answer.

In devising his brand new policy, Cardinal Law should have expanded his "zero-tolerance" to apply not only to perpetrators, but also to those that have aided and abetted them. By his failure to act responsibly he has repeatedly condoned and tacitly promoted the "*horror*" about which you wrote in your February 19 statement. Speaking as a father, I believe he might just as well have committed these acts himself. He knew and he let it happen again. It is that simple.

*He knew and he let it happen again.*

Under true zero-tolerance, it would seem to me that Bernard Law's name should be on the list turned over for investigation, as should all the other bishops and priests who've known, including ironically the Chair of the Conference's Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse, whose diocese just got around to releasing the names of fourteen suspected priests in the shadow of the Boston debacle. Wilton, it could have been my eleven-year-old Jonathan those bastards sodomized under Law's watchful eye, and thanks to treacherous men like him, it could still be.

There are millions of Jonathans out there, a tiny fraction of whom you've baptized, confirmed, anointed, married, or even ordained. And there are millions of Jameses and millions of Erins. And it astounds me that the Church, which has all but casually reduced this horrible assortment of acts to an acronym, can't or won't protect them from Herself. Bernard Law is your friend and the ranking Cardinal in the United States, and you naturally want to defend him. Politically, you *need* to defend him. In Church terms he is your brother, but you'd feel differently if you had a son.

And so would the Holy Father, whose decision to not decide in this matter will, I fear, ultimately reconstitute his legacy from one of tirelessly defending the defenseless to tiredly defending the indefensible, just as it appears he is preparing to leave that legacy behind.

I say without fear of contradiction that if Bernard Law had a grandson or nephew who served Mass at St. Julia's in Weston and had been fondled or raped there, he would have used every resource at his vast disposal to ensure that John Geoghan never saw another child, let alone had an opportunity to sexually devastate one. Unfortunately, Law is apparently too disaffected to display similar regard for the sons, grandsons and nephews of the people of God in his archdiocese, and now, betrayed, they look upon him in shame, disgust, disbelief and the worst kind of pity. As the families Law directly jeopardized by Geoghan's multiple reassignments struggle with taking their broken faith to another Church or to no Church at all, his carefully crafted words of remorse in front of the cameras place him squarely with Swaggart and Bakker in the public consciousness. The most tragic thing is, despite decades of advice to the contrary, like those other fallen evangelists the Cardinal apparently didn't believe he had done a thing wrong until the process server was at the door and the satellite trucks were stationed at the chancery curb. To the best of my knowledge, at least no children were serially abused as a result of the wayward actions of the other two. *"I have sinned against You, my Lord...."*

Like too many bishops, Law apparently felt he was too busy for, bigger than, or threatened by the inconvenience of scandal, so he chose to let the children and young people of Boston be randomly cast into a life-altering game of *Truth or Dare*. Dioceses sometimes contend that it is preferable to keep perverted priests "in ministry" and monitor them than it is to unleash them on society. The reality is that pedophile clergy casually and craftily use the implicit trust and power of the collar to gain access that an unsuspecting family would never permit to a stranger on the street or even to a close family friend, particularly when "Father" has ridden into town wielding the venerable local bishop's unconditional seal of approval.

And this may come as a shock to you, but I'm not convinced that mandatory *laicization* for abusers is a necessary or right response to these situations. In a way I'm offended by the connotation that the worst Church penalty an abusive priest can endure is to be "thrown back" to the laity. By the same token, though, I do not believe under any circumstance that, by virtue of these men's professed but patently unfulfilled vows, the Church should require us to continue to provide for them. The ultimate slap in the face to the lay people who support the Church so generously is that you continue to make us write checks every month to the clerical deviates who've molested our children, simply because at some point in the past they convinced one of you bishops to consecrate the same twisted hands with which they've perpetrated the abuse. Frankly, though, a long discussion of the billion or so dollars that have been diverted from the good intentions of trusting donors like my parents and grandparents to buy silence of and treatment for victims and predators will have to wait for another day. This is about something important.

I have agonized over a way to help you comprehend the rage these atrocities have inspired in so many Catholic parents, including a graphic account of what's alleged to have happened to some of the young people who have had the misfortune of meeting up with Law's Geoghan and those like him. But then I realized that without being able to imagine the teary-eyed, terrified, confused, misled, trusting, submissive face of your own cherished child in that rectory, automobile, or bedroom, you could no more grasp my anger at having three children who might be harmed by a repeatedly relocated alleged minister of the Gospel than I can understand the excruciating pain of those parents whose children actually have been. And how dare any of us try to fully appreciate the lifelong emotional and physical agony of those of any age whom, when they were young, actually felt the nasty, horrible flesh of one or more of those wretched sons-of-bitches next to theirs!

Even when the victim is a 16- or 17-year-old young adult near the age of consent, if ordination typically occurs at 25 or 26 years of age, the priest-perpetrator in those instances must be at least half again as old as his prey. There is little consolation for Catholic parents in the subtle-but-often-revisited distinction between the true pedophile and the ephedophile. What is most at issue for us is the implied episcopal permission given these men to disregard their vows, the law, the Commandments, and basic human dignity to have sex with our kids, whether they are in potty training, driver's training, or any stage of development in between.

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To you and to many of the other bishops it is shameful and sensationalistic that the media are so relentless in their pursuit of these stories. To me and to the families of the Church in the United States, it is a blessing. Without *The Belleville News-Democrat*, the Diocese of Belleville would certainly not have the benchmark policy for which victims' groups now laud us, and the odds are better than 1-in-10 that one of the priests removed from ministry here in the 90's would now sickeningly be my children's pastor and potential molester. By the same token, without the vigilance of *The Boston Globe* the nine priests (and counting) who have been removed from ministry in the Archdiocese of Boston in the past few weeks would still be "ministering" to youth groups and in classrooms. They would still have occasion to be alone in sacristies, rectories, and vehicles with trusting young children like mine, enjoying the full and unwary consent of unsuspecting parents like me. They would still be probing, fondling, and otherwise destroying these young people's bodies and souls with no regard for anything but their own pathetic gratification. I'm not sure you can adequately address that in a gracious two-pager as President of the Conference.

I have heard bishops and other Church officials complain that the media coverage of this scandal is one-sided and vindictive, that they don't bother to talk about all the dioceses that have complied with Conference recommendations and cleaned up their acts. Please forgive the cynicism, but in all candor we lay people had no idea that a bishop who doesn't routinely reassign perverted clergy was worthy of a press release. Until January of this year, we pretty much took that primary pastoral responsibility as a given. Now the Church's moral authority lies in ruins and nothing, it appears, can be taken for granted. Therein, I'm afraid, is our press release.

If you add the eighty-five or so Boston priests whose names have been given to authorities under Law's zero-tolerance policy to the nine that have been removed since *The Globe* defibbed his heart and resuscitated his conscience, you can count almost 100 men against whom allegations have been made in the past several years. I would bet there's not a single parish of the 373 in the Archdiocese of Boston that hasn't housed at least one. The supposed shepherd in that archdiocese knew there were wolves already inside the gate, but as his sheep were being stalked he securely rolled over and went soundly to sleep anyway. Mercifully, the newspaper rang a harsh, necessary bell to rouse him. Only God can number how many innocent souls have been slaughtered because of Bernard Law. Only God knows how many more he would have silently, indifferently, arrogantly offered up if that bell had not tolled.

For all the anguish the bishops believe the media's hounding has caused the Church and Her leaders, they have provided a service to Catholic families that the Church has incredibly been neither willing nor prepared to provide for Herself. Why should they stop digging when fresh artifacts are so plentiful? For the sake of Catholic children and their parents everywhere, I personally don't want the media to back off until I'm confident there are no more dirty little secrets buried amid the Mysteries of our Faith. Granted, the public in the Diocese of Belleville eventually grew weary of *The News-Democrat's* incessant rehashing of the scandal here ten years ago, but that does not undo our genuine gratitude for their role in reporting it and forcing action on the part of the chancery. When, if ever,

will that vigilance come from within so the media have no scandal upon which to dwell? So that you and those bishops who follow you will no longer have to dread their calls, but can welcome their visits as true expressions of your willingness to *"give [your] lives in full service to the Church as witnesses to Jesus Christ in our midst"*?

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Wilton, I like to think we have an outstanding working relationship and that honesty, while sometimes uncomfortable, is expected and respected. If my recent performance evaluation is a true indication, you must agree. The items about which we've seriously disagreed in these past eight years can be measured in low single digits, but on this one, which is based on an incredibly improbable conflict between your commitment to the Church and mine to my family, there can be no debate and no compromise. Judging by the Archdiocese of Boston's jarring sudden shift from denial to damage control, the media appear to have located the fire that was causing all that smoke. Bernard Law has acknowledged that he has betrayed the most vulnerable in his care, and he should leave quickly and publicly so the Church he claims to hold so dear can get on with Her life. If he remains the Archbishop of Boston for five more years, this horrific chapter will drag on for ten. The time and energy that will be devoted to his saving face will be a drain on the real pastoral work of the Church in that Archdiocese and across the country. It will haunt you and your successors to the Presidency of the Conference.

The healing can't commence until the bleeding stops and the wound is cleaned, and it startles and sickens me that neither a single bishop nor the Conference has had the moral strength to speak out publicly against Law. Though he has somehow managed to sidestep the strict legal definition of an "accessory," The Cardinal Archbishop of Boston has apparently for years straddled a line between abuse permission and promotion, and he has not received so much as a public reprimand from the Vatican or the American bishops. Bernard Law is not only the ranking leader of the Church in the United States, I fear he is the ranking example of all that is wrong with Her.

Canon 351, §1, of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* says, "The Roman Pontiff freely selects men to be promoted as cardinals, who have been ordained at least into the order of the presbyterate and *are especially outstanding in doctrine, morals, piety, and prudence in action....*" Is there not a codicil that says they must remain that way or concede the title? Wouldn't a man who truly claims those attributes willingly step aside in shame when he knows he's repeatedly defaulted on every single one?

Knowing in his heart each and every day for years that he has been personally responsible for the worst fate that can be brought upon another child of God, Bernard Law, allegedly acting *in persona Christi*, has denied reception of the Eucharist to the divorced and others not in "good standing" in the Church, yet he has inexplicably continued to consider himself worthy not only to receive the Body of Christ, but to consecrate it. Forget the media -- how do we explain these disparate standards to the faithful? How can you explain that to me?

Frankly, Wilton, if Law does remain in office, he creates a number of interesting parenting dilemmas for Catholic families like mine. For instance, how might I convince my daughter, a fourteen-year-old high school freshman, that it's wrong to have promiscuous sex with fourteen-year-old boys when the Archbishop of Boston stood by and permitted his priests to use trickery and threats to do exactly that, *also with fourteen-year-old boys*? How do I explain to my eleven-year-old son that Bishop Gregory had to go on television to talk about little boys' privates being touched by priests again because some arrogant old cardinal and his henchmen thought they were singularly smarter than a bunch of contrived policies designed to protect eleven-year-olds? How do I tell my nine-year-old that every person's body is a sacred gift from God to be respected and cared for when His Eminence was willing

to put the blessed bodies of kids his age up for grabs? Sharon and I have worked hard against huge cultural odds to raise our children by the Catholic book, but instead of assisting us in that paramount responsibility, the Church is making our job as primary educators infinitely more difficult.

On September 11, 2001, this nation was knocked right off its foundation. In the northeast and across the country, people flocked to their churches to find comfort and to try to reclaim their lost sense of security. Just when normalcy for many seemed to be almost within sight if not within reach, revelations of the Cardinal's stunning behavior have replicated the trauma of that awful day, which coincidentally also began in Boston. The ripples and aftershocks have been felt nationwide – if it can happen there, people ask, why can't it happen here? And tragically, in many cases, it has. In terms of the toll Law's actions have taken on American Catholics' core beliefs, in terms of the number of lives directly and indirectly devastated by his blatant disrespect for the young people in his pastoral care, many Catholics feel as if September 11 has happened all over again. I certainly do. I'm not being melodramatic when I say that at least this time we know exactly where the one responsible for this madness is hiding. We apparently have no recourse against him, but we know who and where he is. And as the lay faithful realize they can't even take their Church's regard for their children for granted, another powerful "sleeping giant" has been awakened.

In summary, Bishop, despite Bernard Law's larger-than-life persona we have come to realize that in this instance – in too many instances – the man behind the curtain is, pardon the pun, frighteningly Ordinary. He may or may not have been a good man, but somewhere along the way he appears to have lost his heart, his courage, and, some would argue, his brain. For the sake of the children and the Church he must go. All bishops who have done what he has done must go. It's a scary precedent, but after twenty years of having "*worked diligently to learn all we can about sexual abuse,*" I think complicit bishops are due for a scary precedent. It's not that we can't forgive them – we are Catholic Christians, after all – but they have betrayed our trust so deeply and fundamentally that no mortal man's life is long enough to restore it. Those who have demonstrated this unsettlingly casual willingness to deceive cannot be redeemed by hollow forced assurances to start caring first thing tomorrow. Law's apology and newfound commitment to protecting the young would certainly not have seemed so pathetic had they followed the Cardinal's prayerful examination of conscience rather than the newspaper's careful examination of long-sealed court documents.

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Since I have worked with you in the Diocese of Belleville, you have regularly invoked a philosophy handed down to you by your mentor, the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, who admonished you to: "*Tell the truth, Wilton. You'll have less to remember!*" Cardinal Bernardin was right. To truly restore trust in the Catholic Church in the United States, I call upon you to acknowledge publicly that overall our bishops have failed in their efforts to protect our children, and the credibility and moral authority of the Church have suffered almost irretrievably. I suggest that you discard finely honed public relations efforts and get to work. There is no way to positively spin this and move on, and it can't be waited out.

A national policy on sexual abuse of minors by clergy must be written, and enforcement of that policy must be remanded to an independent body, a *Director of Homeland Security* if you will, who should also be a parent with something more at stake than an image. Unprecedented access must be granted to diocesan records, bishops, the Apostolic Nuncio, and the Holy See. A national board of review composed of lay professionals and clergy must be convened to determine fitness for ministry of those priests and bishops accused of abuse or negligence in responding to abuse. A national toll-free hotline must be set up for alleged victims whose calls to their local Churches fall on deaf ears. Reports of allegations and diocesan responses must be made annually to the Catholics of the United States,

including information on diocesan bishops who have not complied. Immediate investigations of those dioceses must be detailed and intensive until they are brought into conformity. Above all else, you have to reach out to the victims whose own bishops – whose own Church – chose to treat them as lepers, sinners, nuisances, or threats to be appeased, silenced, and sent away.

Even in light of so many grotesque public failures, a proposal of this nature and magnitude will undoubtedly and shockingly be met with disfavor and disgust by some bishops in the U.S. I encourage those bishops to express that disgust publicly, not behind the comfortably locked doors of a USCCB Executive Session. It will help you and us to know who they are. Now that the problem is out in the open, let's discuss solutions out in the open as well.

I can assure you that if these or similar drastic steps are not taken, the media (with the support of diocesan staffs and others) will continue to hound every diocese in the land until the faithful can be confident that our entire Church is indeed "*a place of refuge and security, not a place of denial and distress,*" as you so articulately described it in your February statement. This is not a witch-hunt, Bishop, and it needn't become one. It is merely the absolute least the American bishops owe the families of the Church after decades of failing to act appropriately, of failing to provide the most basic protection for our children and young people. It is the least you owe Sharon, our children, and me.

You can implement this next week or you can do it after years of unrelenting public scrutiny, but eventually, I believe, at least this must happen. If it doesn't, more and more mainstream Catholics in tainted dioceses will become enraged and eventually donations from the faithful – ultimately those dioceses' only source of income – will dry up, requiring their bishops to choose between their missions and their mansions, their food buses and their limousines, the "least of their brothers" and Brooks Brothers. What gets cut from affected diocesan budgets in the aftermath of this will tell us much about where your hearts really lie. It should not be the poor, the elderly, the young, the infirm – the legitimate beneficiaries of our diocesan ministries – or my lay contemporaries that provide those ministries who suffer the consequences of the heinous sinful misconduct of our leadership. The depleted bottom line is you simply can't run a major American archdiocese for very long on thirty silver coins....

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Of course, you may choose to summarily disregard this memorandum or file it with the rants of the folks who write week after week about some issue *du jour* in the Church, but if sixteen years in the belly of this beast have earned me anything, I hope it is the right to be heard. As many of those *regulars* write, "I'm not doing this for you as much as I'm doing it for me." Having spent most of my professional life in service to my Church, it occurs to me now that leaving this position would be tantamount to renouncing my Catholic faith – if I don't trust an institution enough to work within it, how can I possibly trust it enough to worship herein? – and I do not intend to do that. My own faith in God and in the people of God is as strong as ever, but how can I reasonably expect my children to want to raise my aforementioned eventual grandchildren in this leadership maelstrom? Sociologists will tell you that once you lose a generation, you've likely also lost the ones that follow it.

The silence is broken, Wilton, and the irony is so incredible it can't be of this world. Only by witnessing firsthand the Church's blatant disregard for the only thing they hold as dear as their faith could millions of truly devout American Catholics even begin to allow themselves to challenge the basic manmade tenets of that faith. We are learning lessons that fly squarely in the face of all we have been conditioned from birth to believe, lessons that from this moment on will apply to every facet of life in the Catholic Church, not just the seedy ones:

- That faith in people cannot be assigned or delegated. It must be earned. It can be lost.

- That no institution – however large, however old – can survive without accountability at every level, even the top.
- That it is not a sin to question authority; indeed, sometimes it is a sin *not* to.
- That what we don't know *can* hurt us.
- That sometimes we have to override a lifetime of personal programming and say what's really in our hearts and on our minds.

I want to be able to sleep well at night, Bishop, but if I sit idly by while this posturing, stonewalling, lying and outright abuse of people and power continues for yet another decade, I feel like I've abrogated my right to sleep at all. There will undoubtedly come a day when my children will ask me how I was able to stand by in good conscience and watch these atrocities unfold. I have to be able to say I spoke up. Whether it makes any difference is up to you and others. You and your brother bishops have an opportunity to start making things right again, and I challenge you to restore our pride and our credibility. You know I will do what I can to help you. We all will, but first we have to be able to trust you. All of you.

Just three days after you were elected President of the Conference, the first Harry Potter film opened and Sharon and I took our kids to see it. At the risk of reducing this situation to a quote from a children's movie (although in some respects, what could be more appropriate?), one of the last lines of dialogue in that film is a lesson of which I'm reminded now: "It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to your enemies, but a great deal more to stand up to your friends." In crafting this memorandum and sharing it with you, I have come to understand profoundly the meaning of that statement. For all the generations that follow us, I'm calling on you to do the same.

I've heard it said that an optimist is someone who believes that the Church is as good as She can ever be; a pessimist, on the other hand, believes the optimist is probably right. Do I believe the Catholic Church, our Church, my children's Church will survive this dark moment in Her history? Absolutely. Will She be different? She will have to be. Will She be better? I don't mean to preach to the choir director here, but if we listen to the Holy Spirit instead of our own flawed egos, She certainly could be.

More than anything else, Christ's Church should be about preserving and promoting innocence, not accelerating its ruin. Pardon the platitude, but it's time we stopped protecting our past and did something to fortify our future. You're not a parent, Wilton, and I can't expect you to fully understand this, but Erin, Jonathan and James deserve better.