

Office of the Archbishop



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October 25, 1991

My People --

Words cannot adequately express my distress over the tragedy of child sexual abuse, especially by priests or other Church personnel. The pain experienced by victims of child abuse is deeply felt by their families, their communities, and by the Church itself.

Like the rest of society, the Church has learned much in recent years about the nature of child sexual abuse. All of us have more to learn. In consultation with various experts in this field, the Archdiocese had developed and implemented specific policies and procedures. By and large, they have proved effective and helpful; but, despite our conscientious efforts, we have made mistakes, for which I am deeply sorry.

Moreover, I want to make sure that such mistakes are not repeated. To this end, I have appointed the Honorable Julia Quinn Dempsey, Judge of the Juvenile Court; Mr. John Madden, past Chairman of the Advisory Council of the Department of Children and Family Services; and Bishop John Gorman, Vicar General of the Archdiocese, to a commission which will immediately examine four areas of concern and will make recommendations for action.

The commission's first order of business will be to address, without delay, any situations involving clergy assignments that might put people at risk. In addition, commission members will review the existing policies and procedures of the Archdiocese relative to sexual misconduct by clergy or other Church personnel, with special attention to the issue of child sexual abuse. I have directed the commission to address specifically the question of whether and under what circumstances a priest -- against whom accusations of sexual misconduct have been lodged -- could engage in parish ministry. Finally, I want the commission to present recommendations about how the Archdiocese might best incorporate laypersons into our review process.

I also want to offer some words of support and encouragement to both parishioners and priests. In dealing with the issue of child sexual abuse, Catholic parishioners throughout the Archdiocese have shown a healthy openness and appropriate concern. They have a right to expect that their trust and faith will not be taken for granted and that honesty and integrity will characterize the decisions which

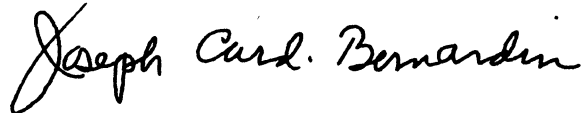
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affect their lives. I empathize with those who have been offended by the Church in any way. I commend them and the vast number of Catholics who, every day in their homes and communities, give living witness to our faith in the Lord Jesus.

Priests stand with their people in sorrow and in joy. Across this Archdiocese, they continue to serve with integrity and generosity. They suffer with you, and I ask you to pray for our priests and support them.

My people, let us renew our faith in the God who knows our sinfulness and loves us, who understands our weakness and pain but offers us grace and redemption.

Devotedly yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph Carl Bernardin". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Archbishop of Chicago