



*Office of the  
Archbishop*

# **Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA**

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## **STATEMENT OF ARCHBISHOP EDWIN F. O'BRIEN to the Priest Chaplains of the Archdiocese for the Military Services On the "Scandal Studies"**

**February 18, 2004**

The long awaited studies, commissioned by our Conference of Bishops, on the extent of clerical sexual abuse of minors will be released on Friday, February 27, 2004.

Predictably, the reports of the National Review Board and John Jay College are bound to capture headlines, few of which will inspire.

The John Jay Study is a quantitative analysis of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy from 1950 through 2002. The National Review Board report, having prior access to the John Jay Study, will be a qualitative report based on interviews with some 60 people, including bishops.

Unfortunately, our Catholic Conference will see the contents of the documents only hours before their release to the public. What follows, then, is an attempt to anticipate the inevitably sensationalist press coverage of what is proving to be one of the darkest moments in the history of our Church in the United States.

1. As to our Archdiocese, two such cases have come forward where active duty priest chaplains have been found guilty of engaging in immoral acts with minors. The Archdiocese has done everything possible to see that victims have been cared for and counseled. Since our inception in 1985, we have been liable for related legal fees of \$100,000.
2. Nationally, while a tragic past cannot be changed, I am convinced that our bishops are taking measures to prevent history's repeat. Those measures include not only the provisions of the June 2003 "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" but also our Conference's commissioning the John Jay and National Review Board studies.
3. Because of the high moral standards rightly expected of priests, sexual misconduct of their kind by Catholic clergy is understandably shocking and upsetting to Catholics and bewildering to all, even if it involved but a single case. As the reports will dramatize, there were many cases throughout the nation. We can only hope for some objectivity on

the part of the press and public in recognizing the steadfast, self-sacrificing service of the countless numbers, the vast majority, of priests the last half-century and more.

4. While no bishop consciously intended to harm a minor, some actions and non-actions on the part of bishops during those years have proved to be, simply, indefensible. Indeed, in the large majority of cases, decisions were made after thorough counsel with professionals in the mental health professions. (A dozen years ago, as a seminary rector, I inquired of several able and experienced psychologists as to early indications of potential sexual predators of minors. Very scant clinical data was available then. Not so the case, now.)
5. All agree that pedophilia and homosexual molestation of teenagers by adults is extensive, if not pervasive, in our society. The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights documents statistical evidence of this societal phenomenon among clergy of other denominations, teachers, medical professionals, coaches, etc. The February 2004 study can be found on their website: [www.catholicleague.org](http://www.catholicleague.org). The statistics are astounding and should be referred to both to place our clergy problem in context and, more urgently, to protect potentially millions of future victims in present danger.
6. I join all the bishops of the United States in prayerful apology to the young victims of clerical sexual abuse. We pledge to pursue fully any and every credible accusation, past, present or future, to cooperate fully with civil and military authorities and to render every possible assistance to victims and their families.
7. Apologies are also in order to all the priests in our Country whose good image and reputation have been stained by episcopal errors, misjudging and mismanagement. Sadly, our yielding to massive pressures from media and law enforcement has led to the public denunciation of a number of innocent clergy who have not been afforded their due process rights before finding their names publicized. Every option to reverse this dreadful injustice must be pursued. Of the half dozen or so of our chaplains who have been recalled by their bishops/superiors to review accusations made prior to their entering military service, two have been fully cleared and returned to active duty. But not without unimaginable emotional strain and embarrassment.
8. Nationwide and surely in our own Archdiocese, our priests are loved, respected and trusted by an almost unanimous consensus of the faithful in our parishes and on our various installations. This is due to the sterling witness of generous pastoral self-sacrifice you render them, day in and day out. May our Good Shepherd reward and renew you for your perseverance and may He purify His Church through the sufferings she continues to endure in His Name.

+Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien

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