



Diocese of Joliet

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Office of the Bishop

425 Summit St.  
Joliet, Illinois 60435

February 2004

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The sexual abuse of minors is a terrible crime but especially when the abuse has been committed by a priest who is called to be a witness of Christ's love on earth. A great cloud was cast over the entire Church because love was replaced with sinful abuse. I am saddened that those children and young people who trusted their priests received such shameful treatment. I want to express my sincere apologies to all of the victims of abuse, to their families, to parishioners in the diocese and to all who have been affected by this horrible tragedy which has damaged our Church. I deeply regret that so many have suffered and continue to suffer because of the sins of a few.

At the end of February a national study of sexual abuse by clergy in the Church in the United States over the past 50 years will be released. I believe this is the first time any group has attempted to gather institutional statistics regarding child abuse in our country.

Statistics have been gathered for the Diocese of Joliet from its inception in 1949 until the present. Although this report is painful and embarrassing, once the full extent of abuse is known, it will help our efforts in preventing any future sexual abuse become even more effective.

In the past 54 years, 27 diocesan priests had credible allegations of sexual misconduct with a minor placed against them. That number represents approximately 3.5% of the 773 diocesan priests who have served in the Joliet diocese from 1949 onward. None of the alleged offending priests is in ministry today. Of the 27, five are deceased and eight left ministry during the past 30 years. Fourteen priests were placed on Administrative Leave; six of them before June of 2002 and eight others after June of 2002, including two during this past year. Of the fourteen who were placed on Administrative Leave, seven are retired. None of the priests numbered above are in any active ministry today.

There were approximately 113 allegations (categorized in the chart below) made against the 27 diocesan priests. A number of victims who suffered abuse many years ago have come forward only in recent years. The last known occurrence of abuse was in 1994.

<b>Year Abuse Occurred</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Year Abuse Reported</b>	<b>Number</b>
1949 - '59	1	1949 - '59 --	
1960 - '69	21	1960 - '69	6
1970 - '79	50	1970 - '79	4
1980 - '89	38	1980 - '89	15
1990 - '99	3	1990 - '99	27
2000 - present --		2000 - present	61

The Diocese of Joliet has had a policy regarding sexual abuse since 1990. That policy has undergone three revisions, the most recent being in June of 2003. Although a Diocesan Review Committee was established early on, its current structure, composed of lay people with particular competence, has been in place since 1993. The Committee reviews all reported allegations of sexual abuse of a minor.

Sister Mary Frances Seeley, OSF has been serving as Victim Assistance Coordinator for the diocese. Her duties include support for the victims by providing them with information about counseling, spiritual direction, retreats, days of reflection, etc. as well as extending an invitation to meet with the Bishop should that be desired. She also advises persons to contact law enforcement officials.

Approximately 11,000 persons including priests, deacons, lay employees and volunteers have already participated in the *Virtus Protecting God's Children* Program begun in June of 2003. Criminal background checks are also required for all of the above. For more than 20 years, the diocese has required psychological testing for all candidates prior to their admission to the seminary.

All of these efforts are preventative measures undertaken to ensure the safety of our children. While we cannot erase the sins of the past, we can learn from the past and take every precaution to ensure that no child is ever hurt again.

Despite the fact that monetary settlements cannot erase the abuse that was inflicted or its memory, the diocese has provided settlements for a number of victims in the amount of \$1,940,000. Approximately \$837,000 was additionally paid through insurance. Settlement funds were obtained from the sale of real estate and investment proceeds. No money that was used came from parishioners' donations to their parishes or from any contributions to the Diocesan Annual Appeal.

In addition, the diocese has provided therapy/counseling for victims and priests in the amount of approximately \$690,842. Legal fees amounted to \$744,526, more than 90% of which was paid by the insurance company. Priests pay their own

legal expenses. If they are falsely accused, they are reimbursed. Over the years, seven of our priests had false or unsubstantiated allegations brought against them.

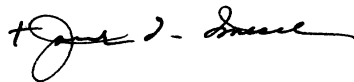
As stated previously, there is no priest in active ministry in the Joliet diocese against whom there has been a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse.

I have met with a number of victims and renew my willingness to meet with persons who have been abused so that I can offer my personal apologies to them. I pledge to do whatever I can to help with their healing process.

The past few years have been difficult times for our Church. Hurt and pain can lead us to despair or to hope. None of us can forget or erase the past but we can make certain that our efforts to prevent abuse will ensure a better and safer future for all of our children.

I conclude with a promise of prayer for all victims of abuse. I ask that you join in prayer with me for healing for all who have been damaged, asking God that their faith and trust will one day be restored.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph L. Imesch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Most Reverend Joseph L. Imesch  
Bishop of Joliet

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING SEXUAL ABUSE ISSUES**

### **How did the Joliet Diocese handle allegations of sexual abuse throughout the years?**

Procedures for dealing with allegations of sexual abuse of minors by priests have changed over the years in response to an increased level of knowledge about sexual abuse and the damage it causes.

At one time sexual abuse was perceived as a moral fault, that is, a sin to be confessed for which the priest was given a penance that he was to perform with contrition and a firm purpose of amendment.

Sexual abuse was later thought to be the result of alcoholism and so the priest was sent for treatment of that illness.

In recent times sexual abuse was given separate treatment. The priest received therapy for sexual abuse at a residential facility or on an outpatient basis. When mental health professionals concluded that the priest had recovered satisfactorily, they recommended that he be returned to parish ministry or be placed in a restricted ministry such as a hospital or prison chaplaincy.

### **Why did some offenders receive assignments instead of being removed entirely from ministry?**

Mental health professionals believed that with appropriate therapy, some sexual abuse offenders could be rehabilitated. A priest was usually sent to a residential facility for treatment. If therapists concluded that the priest was fit for ministry, they recommended his return to parish ministry or placement in a restricted ministry such as a hospital or prison chaplain.

### **What are the current procedures of the Joliet Diocese, especially since the Bishops' meeting of June 2002?**

The Diocese of Joliet adheres to the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young Adults* approved in June 2002. In keeping with the terms of the *Charter*, allegations are reported to civil authorities and referred to the Diocesan Review Board. The Bishop has the discretion to remove the accused immediately from ministry prior to any recommendation from the Review Board. Any instance of abuse occurring after 2002 must be reported to the Vatican. Counseling continues to be offered to victims as well as to the accused. No priest who has had a credible allegation placed against him is ever returned to ministry, even restricted ministry. Persons throughout the Diocese who come into contact with children are required to attend the *Protecting God's Children* program so that they can learn about situations that could lead to sexual abuse as well as to recognize the warning signs of a perpetrator.

### **What is the Church doing for victims?**

Anyone who alleges to have been victimized by a member of the clergy is listened to with compassion and empathy by one of the Bishops, the Victim Assistance Coordinator (Sr. Mary Frances Seeley – 815-263-6467) or the Chancellor. Opportunities for counseling and spiritual assistance are offered to victims. The Diocese has posted information about area support groups for victims on its website. All parishes have brochures available detailing assistance available to victims.

### **Has the Bishop met with victims of sexual abuse?**

The Bishop and the Auxiliary Bishop have met with a number of victims and their families on an individual basis. Both have also spoken to victims/families over the telephone. The bishops are aware of the healing effect such meetings/conversations have. They continue their willingness to minister in this way to victims.

### **Has the Bishop conferred with SNAP?**

Bishop Imesch recently met with a representative of Illinois SNAP. The Bishop cares deeply for the welfare of persons who have been harmed by sexual abuse. Representatives of SNAP or other victims' groups are not excluded from his concern.

### **What if I am a victim of sexual abuse by a priest?**

Report abuse to civil authorities. Notify the Diocese by calling the Victim Assistance Coordinator, Sr. Mary Frances Seeley, OSF, (815-263-6467), or the Chancellor (815-722-6606).

### **When did abuse take place? When did victims come forward?**

Although most cases of abuse took place in the 70's and 80's, over 50 percent of alleged victims reported their abuse from 2000-2003.

### **Why are allegations now becoming public?**

After years of silent pain, victims realized they were not alone and began to come forward. Some victims met with diocesan officials and were offered pastoral care. Others chose to make their abuse known by filing lawsuits.

### **Why did the Bishop or the Diocese not know that some priests were doing such terrible things?**

Victims did not report their abuse. Some chose to report only many years later.

### **How many priests from the Diocese of Joliet have been accused?**

Over the past 54 years (the Diocese was founded in 1949), 773 diocesan priests have served in the Diocese of Joliet. Of these, 27 or approximately 3.5% have had credible allegations made against them. Any priest against whom a credible allegation has been made may not celebrate Mass publicly, wear the Roman collar or use the title, "Father".

### **Why doesn't the Diocese settle lawsuits as other dioceses have done?**

The Diocese has settled a number of lawsuits. Each case is reviewed and settled on its own merits, independent of any other case.

### **Are parish funds going to pay settlements?**

No parish funds were used for any settlements. Insurance paid part of the costs. The balance was from money realized from proceeds of investments or from the sale of unnecessary properties. Investments and real estate were from funds donated by people 30, 40 or more years ago. Throughout the years, the investment portfolio and real estate value increased significantly. When a piece of property was no longer needed for a parish church, that property was then sold usually for a greater price than was paid for its purchase. It is those proceeds that were used for settlements.

### **What about money given to the Diocesan Annual? How is it used?**

Money from the Diocesan Appeal is used entirely to fund the various agencies and ministries in the Diocese. None of this money is used to settle cases, etc. Diocesan Appeal money is used to fund the Catholic Schools Office, the Religious Education Office, Catholic Charities, College Campus Ministry, the Diaconate, Office of Divine Worship, Family Ministry, Hispanic Ministry, Ministry Formation, Vocations Office, Peace & Justice, the *Catholic Explorer*, etc.. Appeal funds are also used for the education of seminarians as well as to pay the salaries of hospital chaplains. A full accounting of how the Diocesan Appeal funds are spent is presented each year in the financial report published in the *Catholic Explorer*, the diocesan newspaper.

### **Does the Diocese have a Review Board? If so, who are the members?**

A Review Committee was established in 1990 to review allegations of sexual abuse. The current structure of the Review Committee (mostly lay persons not in the employ of the diocese) has been in place since 1993.

Members include: a woman attorney, a member of a county states attorney's office, two women therapists, two retired judges, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a pastor, and a former sexual abuse investigator with the state police. The names of the members were published in the diocesan newspaper.

### **What is being done for the continuing education of priests regarding sexual abuse?**

Bishop Imesch and the priests of the Diocese have met several times to discuss the issue of sexual abuse. Priests have been provided educational opportunities and times for reflection so they could discuss their response to the sexual abuse issue, its impact on their spiritual lives and the exercise of their ministry. Having a spiritual director or mentor is advisable. All priests are required to participate in the *Protecting God's Children* program.

## **What is being done for seminarians?**

Prior to their admittance as seminarians, candidates undergo criminal background checks. For over twenty years, candidates have taken a battery of psychological tests and have had personal interviews prior to being accepted as seminarians. Seminarians attend classes and special seminars regarding Catholic spirituality, celibate sexuality, sexual development, dealing with sexual feelings, etc.

## **Can you guarantee that sexual abuse of a minor will never happen again and that children will be kept safe?**

We wish we could, but no one can make such a guarantee, however the Diocese has taken a number of steps to make sure that children are safe:

✦The *Diocesan Pastoral Policy Regarding Sexual Abuse of Minors* was revised in 2003. It was distributed to all clergy, religious, diocesan, parish, school and religious education personnel. (The original policy in place since 1990, had undergone revisions in 1993 and 1997.)

✦A document entitled *Standards of Behavior for Those Working with Minors* was published on June 1, 2003. It details standards of ministerial behavior and appropriate boundaries for clergy as well as for other church personnel who have regular contact with children and young people. Copies were distributed to all clergy, religious, diocesan, parish, school and religious education personnel as well as to parents of children in school and religious education programs.

Both of the above named documents may be found on the diocesan website. They have been translated into Spanish and Polish.

✦The *Virtus Protecting God's Children* program was adopted for use throughout the Diocese. Parish facilitators provide educational sessions for clergy, teachers, catechists, and others who have regular, sustained contact with children. Participants learn to avoid situations that could lead to sexual abuse as well as to recognize the warning signs of a perpetrator.

✦Background checks are required of clergy, school and religious education administrators, teachers, catechists, athletic personnel, diocesan employees, and all others, including volunteers, who have significant or sustained contact with children.

✦Prior to anyone being accepted as a seminarian for the Diocese, the person must undergo a thorough screening by the Vocation Office, which also includes a background check.

✦Before any priest or deacon can begin ministry in the Joliet Diocese, his bishop or major superior must provide the Diocese with the cleric's record together with information about anything that would raise questions about his fitness for ministry including any allegations regarding his sexual activity.

✦Anyone who has had a credible allegation of sexual misconduct placed against him/her is not permitted to exercise ministry in the Diocese.

✦The Review Committee, established in 1990 to review allegations of sexual abuse, continues its work of reviewing allegations. The current structure of the Review Committee has been in place since 1993.