

TO PROTECT and TO HEAL:
A LETTER TO THE CLERGY, RELIGIOUS AND LAITY
OF THE DIOCESE OF TOLEDO
ON THE TRAGEDY OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF MINORS BY
CLERICS

Dear Friends in Christ:

As all of you are keenly aware, the sexual abuse of minors by members of the clergy has had a devastating effect not only on the victims, but on the whole Church. This tragedy is still very much with us, but many serious steps are being taken to heal its effects as best we can and to root out its causes.

As your new Bishop I think it is important for me to share with you where we stand in the Diocese of Toledo. I am sure you also want to be informed about the steps we are taking to protect children and young people from sinful and criminal acts of sexual abuse.

First, however, I want to acknowledge publicly the enormous personal suffering, anger and hurt inflicted on the victims of sexual abuse by clerical perpetrators, and in many cases by the failure of church authorities in our country to respond in a manner commensurate with this grave sin and crime. It is particularly heinous that any ordained minister should use his position of trust as a spiritual father to take sexual advantage of any person, much less a minor.

To the victims and their families I offer a humble apology and the expression of my deepest regret. For my part I can only pledge to you that I will do everything humanly possible to further the goals that we Bishops set for ourselves at our 2002 meeting in Dallas: namely, to promote healing and reconciliation, to guarantee an effective response to all allegations, to ensure accountability and to protect the faithful in the future.

The healing of wounds will take a long time. As pastor of a parish I witnessed first hand the disbelief and anger of my own parishioners at what was happening in our church beginning in the early months of 2002. I also know the tremendous cross that has been borne by the overwhelming majority of our clergy who have never committed any act of sexual abuse. Whatever negative conclusions people in general might have reached about the Catholic clergy, our great comfort and strength is the esteem and confidence that parishioners have for the clergy in their parish whom they know to be virtuous and dedicated priests and deacons.

One of the things the U.S. Bishops agreed to do in Dallas two years ago was to commission a study carried out by the John Jay School of Criminal Justice in New York on the extent of sexual abuse of minors by the clergy. On February 27, 2004 the John Jay study will report on the nationwide incidence of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy from 1950 to June 2002, together with other data.

Whatever the results may be for the whole country, my first interest and yours is to know the facts and figures for the Diocese of Toledo. For that reason I am attaching to this letter the John Jay statistics for our Diocese with this difference: Whereas the John Jay study ended with the year 2002, what I am sharing with you is current to the present day.

I want to assure you that the Diocese of Toledo's commitment to protecting youth began well before the events of 2002. Our Diocese first issued formal policies on sexual abuse in 1988 which were revised in 1995. Last month the national Gavin Compliance Audit commended the Diocese of Toledo for these past efforts, and also found the Diocese to be in full compliance with the U.S. Bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children & Young People* and its complementary *Essential Norms*. The only recommendation of the Audit was that we update our 1995 policy. Today I am issuing that updated revision which now incorporates the provisions of both the *Charter* and the *Norms*.

By way of commentary and summary allow me to highlight the following points:

Reporting & Investigations: Our policy commits the Diocese to full compliance with civil law requirements and full cooperation with civil investigations of allegations of sexual abuse of minors. The Diocese has also cooperated with civil authorities in reporting allegations of sexual abuse from individuals who are no longer minors. The Diocese has also established a procedure for conducting its own investigation using experienced and highly qualified retired police detectives. The appointment of these officers received a commendation in the Gavin Audit Report.

Victims Assistance Ministry: Mr. Frank DiLallo was appointed the second Diocesan Case Manager in 1997. He may be reached at 419-244-6711 or at fdilallo@toledodiocese.org.

Disclosure: The preliminary investigation by the Diocese remains confidential. However, once an allegation has been determined to be credible there will be no attempt to withhold information from the public. In a substantiated case, public disclosure will include acknowledgement of the allegation and the steps which have been taken against the offender. If a victim requests anonymity, allegations will be publicly disclosed while protecting the victim's identity.

Review Board: An eight member review board was established in November 2002 to receive the results of investigations and to make recommendations for further action to the Bishop. The Board is comprised of one priest and a diverse group of lay persons, including a retired city manager, attorney, pediatrician, clinical psychologist, a victim of clergy sexual abuse, and two parent/community volunteers.

Removals: Clergy against whom a credible allegation has been made are removed from public ministry as a precautionary measure, pending the final outcome of their case as determined by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome. “When even a single act of sexual abuse by a priest or deacon is admitted or established after an appropriate process in accord with Canon Law, the offending priest or deacon will be removed permanently from ecclesiastical ministry, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state, if the case so warrants” (*Essential Norms*, no. 8)

Pastoral Response: When the Diocese learns of an allegation, an immediate attempt is made by a specially appointed Pastoral Response Team to meet with the alleged victims and their families, to listen with patience and compassion to their experiences and concerns, and to show solidarity with them. Counseling is also offered in the hope of promoting healing and reconciliation.

Victim Counseling & Confidentiality: In June of 2003 a three-member Clinical Advisory Panel was established by the Diocese. The panel reviews the treating therapist’s progress report after every 25 counseling sessions, and formulates a clinical opinion regarding further counseling. Therapy is to last as long as required to promote the victim’s continued healing. Progress reports are treated with the utmost confidentiality, and the Diocese does not receive any information about the victims.

Prevention: The Diocese has established background evaluation procedures, including fingerprinting, for all clergy and any personnel or volunteers who work with minors. The Diocese has also made a commitment to strengthening the screening and evaluation of candidates for ordination.

Education & Awareness: The Diocese has an established “safe environment” program. Our efforts include:

- *A Code of Pastoral Conduct* has been issued for clergy and all diocesan personnel who regularly interact with children and young people.
- *Expectations For All Who Minister To Youth* is a brochure for all employees and volunteers which outlines appropriate adult behavior when working with or supervising minors.
- *Protecting Youth and Those Who Serve Them* is the name given to mandatory diocesan-wide workshops for clergy, educators, scout leaders, coaches and all other persons who minister to youth. All diocesan personnel both volunteer and employed, are required to be re-certified every five years. More than 3,500 people have been certified through this program thus far.
- The objectives of the Diocesan Policy are meant to be integrated into the existing curriculum of schools and parishes. Opportunities for community education are to be provided as well, working in cooperation with local agencies whenever possible.


Public Information: Click on our diocesan website at www.toledodiocese.org. Under the heading *To Protect and To Heal* you will find our *Policy on Sexual Abuse of Minors*; as well as links to the U.S. Bishops’ Office of Child and Youth Protection, the *Charter for the Protection of*

Children and Young People and Essential Norms and the Gavin Audit Report on the Implementation of the Charter of Children and Young People.

I would like to leave you with something I said in my Installation Homily as your new Bishop last December 4th. On that happy occasion I said: "Whatever the challenges may be, whatever the difficulties we face, however much it may sometime seem that our communion, our fellowship in Christ is weakened, even threatened, that our proclamation of the Word of Life falls on deaf ears . . . still we have every reason to hope. And the reason is simple. Our hope is founded on Jesus Christ, who does not disappoint."

My dear friends, let us be sure to fix all our hopes on Jesus Christ at a difficult time not only in the life of the Church, but in our society as well. Without minimizing for a moment the gravity of clerical sexual abuse, it must be acknowledged that there is widespread sexual abuse, sexual sin and crime against the human person in our country today. Left to ourselves we faint and fail; only Jesus can save us and raise us up. Please join me in praying to him for everyone who has been so deeply wounded by these terrible sins and crimes wherever they occur.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leonard P. Blair". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair
Bishop of Toledo

February 13, 2004