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HERALD OF HOPE



Reform, reconciliation, renewal

Archbishop
Timothy M. Dolan

The new year of Our Lord, 2003, provides all a time of resolve and recommitment, and, in that spirit, I wish to address the painful issue of the sexual abuse of young people by the clergy and other church personnel.

Since my arrival here four months ago, this sad and complex scandal has been a major preoccupation. I have listened attentively to many brave and eloquent victims-survivors of abuse, to committed professionals who help them, as well as to so many among the people of God; I have listened to our Holy Father, to my brother bishops of the country, to my brother priests and deacons, to our religious, and to our pastoral leaders. Most of all, all of us have listened to God's Word, as Jesus continues to invite his church to respond to this crisis with courage and compassion.

I hear him challenge us to **reform, reconciliation, and renewal.**

I. Reform:

The horror of this sin, this sickness, this crime of abuse of our youth calls the church and all society to genuine reform.

The bishops of the country,

encouraged by Pope John Paul II, have moved vigorously to see that such reform has begun. While, tragically, due to our sinful nature, we can never be sure that such a crime will not occur again in the future, we can be firm that those who have committed such terrible acts are never again assigned as priests. We can also resolve that the strict requirements of the bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" and the norms to implement them are in force here in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

To this end, I am now able to announce the members of the **Archdiocesan Review Board**, which will have the mandate of cooperating with civil authorities in assessing future allegations of sexual abuse of minors, providing counsel regarding suitability for ministry, and reviewing all archdiocesan policies to make sure they are in line with what we have pledged to do. The five members — and we may decide to add more — are:

Hannah Dugan, a member of Gesu Parish in Milwaukee, an attorney for the Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee, skilled especially in representing the poor and helpless;

Margaret Farrow, a member of St. Anthony by the Lake Parish in Pewaukee, parent and grandparent, Wisconsin's 42nd lieutenant-governor, and longtime respected and effective public servant;

Dr. Charles Lodl, clinical psychologist in private practice in Mequon, with a specialty in therapy for victims and offenders, and active in community programs of education to prevent abuse;

Donald Schuenke, a member of St. Mary Parish in Elm Grove, retired chairman of Northwestern Mutual, parent and grandparent, former chairman of the board of Marquette University, and noted civic leader;

The **Rev. James Connell**, a priest of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, pastor of Holy Name of Jesus Parish and St. Clement parishes, both in Sheboygan, also vice-chancellor of the archdiocese, with a doctorate in Canon Law.

This important review board will benefit from the policies already in effect due to the diligence of the Eisenberg Commission. That panel, led by the late Dean of the Marquette University School of Law, put into place a clear system of referring all allegations to law enforcement officials — something the archdiocese had already begun to do — and even, if necessary, undertaking an independent investigation, led at this time by retired Judge John Fiorenza, when accusations fall outside the purview of the law.

As I trust is clear from the caliber of the members of this review board, it will be of significant value in implementing the reform called for by so many whose confidence in the church

has been shaken. It has also become very clear to me that, while I must always give this issue priority, I need a trusted delegate to oversee and coordinate our response to this crisis. I am appointing the chancellor of the archdiocese, Dr. Barbara Anne Cusack, a noted jurist respected by all parties, to be my delegate in the area of sexual abuse of minors by clergy.

At the same time, we have in place our own tribunal to make sure that the rights of victims and accused priests, as spelled out in the Code of Canon Law, and insisted upon by the Vatican, are protected.

Reform means we have recognized the mistakes of the past, and are determined to do our best to see that they are not repeated. As abhorrent as people find the abuse of a young person by a priest, they tell me they are more shocked by the past reassignment of such a priest, even after therapy, and by the failure of the church at times to cooperate fully with law enforcement officials and report such crimes. The clear steps now in place should see that this does not happen again.

While respectful of some necessary confidentiality, another component of reform is transparency. The church must be as open as possible in letting the people know the facts and implications of this scandal. Many ask about the financial impact. People legitimately wonder how much of their money has been spent for attorney and court fees, care of accused priests, and professional counseling and settlements for those abused.

Very shortly, I will mail to every Catholic home in southeastern Wisconsin the results of the recently-completed annual

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audit of the archdiocese by a new firm, Virchow, Krause & Company, LLP, and therein publicize the amount spent in the areas listed above. It's your money — I am but the steward. Future settlements will be considered only after review by our Archdiocesan Finance Council — composed mostly of lay professionals in the field of finance — and the College of Consultors — a group of priests mandated by Canon Law to advise the bishop on important decisions.

An equally essential area of transparency regards our cooperation with law enforcement officials. Of course, as you know, especially after the **charter** and **norms**, every accusation goes directly to the proper officials. Thus, I will make available to the District Attorney's Office of Milwaukee County the names and details of all past credible allegations of sexual abuse by priests still living to make sure that the requirements of the law are being met. I also repeat my encouragement to anyone who has been a victim of such abuse to report this to the police and to the archdiocese.

For the record, as of today, the archdiocese has knowledge of 39 diocesan priests from the past 70 years (since such records were kept) with documented and substantiated allegations of sexual abuse involving a minor. Fourteen of these priests are deceased. Of those alive, none are in active ministry; eight have resigned with full restrictions against any ministry; one is disabled; nine are without assignment under full restriction; three have left the ministry and do not function as priests; and four are in stages of canonical process toward laicization or dismissal. The requirements of both civil and church law are being obeyed.

I was taught, as I know you were, that the best way to reform after sin or misdeed is to learn from past error, and resolve not to let it happen again. With the above reform in place, I pray we can move forward.

II. Reconciliation:

This tragedy has left many people terribly hurt and scarred: first and foremost, of course, are those abused, who bear the pain

forever. I also learned by listening to such victim-survivors that the agony extends to their families. Parishes, too, have been fractured, and the morale of our priests has been seriously hurt due to the sins of fewer than 2 percent of their brothers. And our people feel embarrassment, shame, and anger over this terrible scandal. The entire Body of Christ has been wounded.

Reconciliation cannot begin until true sorrow is expressed. So I say it again: I am heartily sorry for the sins and crimes of priests, bishops, and church personnel who molested our young people, and for the poor judgments of some bishops who failed to take proper action.

Well over a decade ago, **Project Benjamin** began in this archdiocese, one of the pioneer such programs in the nation. Since then, approximately 250 people — victims, families, and others affected — have sought spiritual and emotional help through this initiative, which is the official outreach of the church in southeastern Wisconsin to victims. Testimony from many victims attests to how this program has helped healing and reconciliation.

As effective as Project Benjamin has been, it engages in ongoing improvement, and wants to do even better. Thoughtful criticisms and suggestions as to how it can improve have come during much consultation this past year. We are in the process of instituting a new advisory board for Project Benjamin, which will undertake a thorough study to make sure this outreach continues as effectively, objectively, and competently as possible.

I want especially to tap the excellent resources of local professionals who helped structure last October's listening sessions to assist us in making sure Project Benjamin has the precision of

purpose and all the resources it needs to fulfill its mandate of reconciliation. I would even hope the new advisory board can help us extend outreach to those family members who have been shattered by the abuse suffered by a child, sibling, or spouse.

But, as important as such projects are, there is no replacement for personal, individual outreach and concern. Bishops might not be experts in law or psychology — but we are experts, I hope, in God's love and compassion. I was so moved at the painful listening sessions last fall to hear story after story of how victims — grievously abused by priests or others in the church — had also been helped to heal by devoted priests, deacons, sisters, and lay leaders in the church.

Sometimes I am the one who must personally meet with victims and their families to offer reconciliation and spiritual healing. I have done this and will continue to do so. During the early months of 2003, I will be available for three extended periods: **Monday, Jan. 27** — 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.; **Monday, Feb. 10** — 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.; and **Thursday, March 6** — 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. The place will be the Catholic Charities Center, 2021 N. 60th St., (60th and Lloyd streets), in Milwaukee. Any victims or members of their families can just show up to see me, or call a voice-mail phone number we have set up [(414) 769-3536] so a message can be left — anonymous, if desired — stating a time most preferred.

I plan to do more of these sessions in different areas of the archdiocese in a sincere attempt to be available to anyone who has suffered from this scandal, and to circulate the details of my availability among centers devoted to therapy for victims and their families.

In addition, I have asked a

number of our priests, plus some religious women and lay ecclesial ministers, all hailed by survivors and their families for their compassion and competence, to be available for the spiritual reconciliation at the heart of healing. Their contact information is available through Project Benjamin.

In my extensive listening and consultation, I also learned that a roadblock to reconciliation can be the church's position on certain laws regarding sexual abuse. Thus, the bishops of the state need to study carefully the legislation to be considered by our elected representatives in Madison next term, and we have plans to do so, giving particular attention to the observations of our lay advisors trained in legal matters, as well as to the other religious leaders of the state.

However, the church's outreach to those who have suffered must go beyond the requirements of the law. We have a duty in justice and charity to bring about reconciliation, concentrating on the pastoral, spiritual, and emotional needs of our brothers and sisters who suffer. Nor can we forget the demands of restorative justice. Some victims have suffered financial loss and have had to spend their own resources toward recovery, and can legitimately look to the church for some recompense.

When I was reviewing our statements of financial accountability, to which I referred earlier, a copy of which you will soon receive, I noted that, in the expenses borne by the archdiocese in dealing with this scandal, more money went for legal fees than to the needs of caring for victims. My goal would be to minimize as much as possible the need for such legal fees, and to concentrate instead on the need for therapy, healing, and restorative justice.

A positive sign is the hopeful proposal of mediation. Through this process, the legitimate needs and expectations of victim-survivors are presented to representatives of the archdiocese, who then offer a proposed response of pastoral, spiritual, and emotional care, plus considerations of mate-

rial help with the goal of restorative justice.

My vision of this process would include minimal involvement by attorneys, with money much more fairly spent on the just needs of those harmed. I am grateful for the initiative of our survivor advocates urging mediation instead of litigation.

Of course, I worry, because I also have a clear duty to protect the resources of the church, to see that they are used as you, the donors, intended: namely, to support the mission of the church to teach, serve, and sanctify.

As will be clear from the statement of financial accountability soon to be published, contrary to the myth, we do not have tons of money, and, what we do have is strictly designated only to be used for the purpose intended. Thus, if lawyers come at me with demands and deadlines, I have a duty to the people of the archdiocese, and have no choice but to seek legal counsel as well, and to exercise the rights given us in the law to properly steward our limited resources.

It is my earnest hope that the mediation process that I have envisioned will take the place of litigation. I hear from so many that, when matters reach litigation, everyone loses.

In proposing this, I want to make it clear that the mediation I envision is not mediation in the traditional sense of the word, where the parties meet to resolve pending or threatened litigation. As I mentioned earlier, the archdiocese has no choice but to move to dismiss any litigation filed against it. The mediation I envision is a process independent of litigation where victims and their advocates meet with representatives of the archdiocese, without lawyers, to come to a

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response of pastoral, spiritual, emotional, and restorative care.

The genuine desire for **reconciliation** impels us to continue to do everything possible to heal the wounds inflicted upon so many.

III. Renewal:

This is the most important area of all. I believe with all my heart and soul that Jesus is purifying and renewing his church through all of this sorrow and pain. At the listening sessions last fall, I was so moved to hear speaker after speaker eloquently point to the power of their faith in providing light in the darkness, and their heartfelt desire to return to prayer and to spiritual health. One advocate urged all the victims to return to the church, the sacraments, and the Eucharist, noting this as the best thing they could do to help themselves.

Our priests attest to the fact that, in spite of their fraternal suffering, they are sensing a renewed spirit of prayer, with a recommitment to fidelity, holiness, humility, and priestly virtue, and that they have been supported through this past year of crisis by the encouragement of their people.

Young men are coming forward to explore a vocation, telling us they want to be part of the solution, not the problem. And Catholics throughout the country seem to have reclaimed their birthright as baptized and

confirmed members of the church, eager to see the church they love begin the rising that must come after so much dying. They are recommitted to the teachings of God's Word, and to the message of Jesus and his church, realizing that the problem is not in Catholic teaching, but in our failure to live it and obey it.

One of the ways this renewal continues is through education. The archdiocese is committed to offering helpful, proven programs of education to priests, deacons, religious, lay leaders, teachers, youth ministers, parents, and children themselves, to assist us in preventing abuse, detecting it, and dealing with its effects. I have accepted the gracious offer of local therapists and victim assistance to help us in these initiatives of education. Child abuse is a curse not only in the church, but in all areas of society, even, sadly, within families, and the church must be a leader in helping to educate against it.

Our priests and pastoral leaders tell us they could use continuing formation in how best to minister to those victims who come to them for pastoral care, and we will provide it. I want such formation available in our seminary, and in the programs of ongoing education all our priests are called upon to take.

Likewise will we engage in the renowned "Renew" program, so successful in the past in the

archdiocese, and now re-tailored to bring about spiritual healing in the midst of the present struggle caused by the scandal. Each parish will be encouraged to offer this tested program of renewal, study, small group sharing, and prayer during the upcoming season of Lent, as a means of spiritual renewal in the church.

I repeat: I am convinced this is a real occasion of **renewal** for the church, as the Lord can mysteriously bring good from evil.

Reform – Reconciliation

– Renewal: Our "New Year Resolution": What is essential is that we keep doing what we as the church do best. This past year has daily shown us stories of the sinful and destructive side of the church. But, in care for families, children and young people — especially those poor, forgotten, sick, and abused — nobody does it better than the church. No other institution in history, or in the world today, cares and nurtures children and young people more effectively than the church. Our Divine Founder exclaimed, "Let the little children come to me," an invitation repeated by his church. The current crisis moves us to prayer: prayers of sorrow, repentance, and conversion, yes; but also prayers of a renewed commitment to Christ and his church, showing us the way, teaching us the truth, and giving us life.

A blessed New Year!
Most Rev. Timothy M. Dolan
Archbishop of Milwaukee
Jan. 1, 2003
Solemnity of Mary,
Mother of God