

# CATHOLIC HERALD

www.chnonline.org

## Dispute resolution system will mediate clergy abuse cases

*Archdiocesan property sale likely to finance necessary financial payments*

Several times this year I have written about the process of reform, reconciliation and renewal we have taken on in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee to address the pain, hurt and suffering of victims-survivors of clergy sexual abuse of minors. Just last week, I wrote to you about the church being part of the solution by embarking on a large-scale “Safe Environment” training of parish and school personnel and volunteers. This week, I write about ongoing developments about how we work with victims-survivors of clergy sexual abuse.

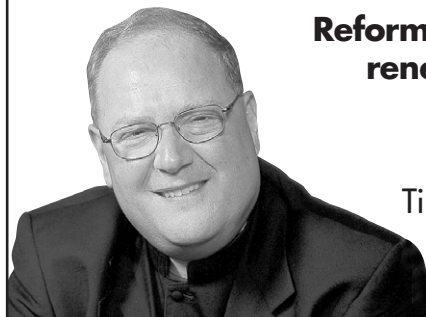
Each time I have written or talked about this issue, I have encouraged people to tell me what they think. And you have — in great number, for which I am grateful. While we have made evident progress, it’s clear that the wound remains with us. There is frustration among many, myself included, who feel more helpful progress could be made. I also know that it will be forever up to the church to demonstrate that it cares, and to carry out the actions that victims-survivors and our parishioners expect.

One of those expectations is and should be that the church deal fairly, compassionately and justly with those who have been victims-survivors of clergy sexual abuse.

Currently, victim and family counseling provided by outside mental health professionals is available. For the past 12 years, we have paid for counseling and therapy for victims-survivors and their families. This assistance is available even before any allegations are substantiated. The archdiocese has thus far spent more than three-quarters of a million dollars on therapy and family assistance, and these services will continue to be offered.

Our motivation as church has to be one of justice, charity and compassion. Because of that, this past January, I announced a pastoral mediation program to address the needs of victims-survivors and invited them to approach us for pastoral mediation during this past year. About 10 people did or are in the process of doing so and, from what they tell me, most were very satisfied with both the process and the outcomes. You’ll recall from my past

## HERALD OF HOPE



**Reform, reconciliation and renewal: Continued**

Archbishop  
Timothy M. Dolan

reports that there have been 29 other victim-survivors who received financial consideration in past years.

However, not everyone has been accepting of this process or the system developed to reach out to victims-survivors in this way. So I have decided to make some changes.

First, because some victims-survivors tell me they are not comfortable approaching the church for help, I am asking Eva Soeka, a nationally and locally respected, professionally-trained mediator, to design a dispute resolution system to handle cases involving clergy sexual abuse of minors. Eva is the director of the Center for Dispute Resolution Education at Marquette University, and former associate dean at Marquette University Law School, but will take on this duty as part of her private work, not in conjunction with the university. Like the

Eisenberg Commission, I hope “outsourcing” this important process will provide both accountability and credibility, and make it less painful for victims-survivors.

Thus, the contact point for survivors who want to access the dispute resolution system will also be outside the church structure. Eva’s role will be to design this system and manage the process. She will assemble a group of qualified mediators and victim-survivors will be encouraged to access the system once its design is complete. Eva will be carefully working during the next months on the system design and the announcement of the details should be made in January 2004.

Prior to making this decision, I consulted with a number of individuals and groups, including the Community Advisory Board whose membership includes victim-survivors, advo-

Serving the people of the Milwaukee Archdiocese

# CATHOLIC HERALD

www.chnonline.org

cates, and therapists. They are in complete agreement that moving the mediation process away from the church structure and asking a respected individual such as Eva Soeka to develop a new system are wise decisions.

Second, I have decided that a fund be established, at the cost of sacrifice, to make the financial payments necessary as a result of this new mediation system. It will be hard to find the money since, as was clear from the financial report I sent to all of you at the beginning of this year, we do not have extra money sitting around. This means that, in conversation with our Archdiocesan Finance Council, I will probably have to sell property given to or purchased by the archdiocese years ago. An initial review of the financial value of this property indicates this fund would approach \$4 million.

Although I must acknowledge that everything the church has come from the generosity of its benefactors, no monies from the Catholic Stewardship Appeal, Catholic Charities, Saint Francis Seminary, or other collections, or designated for the pastoral, educational, and charitable works of the archdiocese can, in justice, be used for this purpose. The cost of sacrifice for the church will be part of its continued penance. The funds are limited, but, as the survivors tell us, no amount of money can

adequately compensate the hurt done. Still, we must make the effort to tangibly help them toward restoration.

We work to settle these cases because the victims-survivors tell me they need a sense of closure, and because our people expect us to act in the victims' best interest. Frankly, when the focus of settlements is only cash, I worry about whether the emotional, psychological and spiritual healing needs for these individuals are adequately being met. I also hate seeing so much money go to attorneys, rather than to the needs of victim-survivors themselves, so this voluntary mediation should be more helpful.

I will continue to meet with victims-survivors who ask me to do so. I will be part of whatever mediation system is designed, and will be present at the mediation sessions if that's what a victim-survivor wants. Over the last 14 months, I have met with dozens of victims in two group sessions, and about 30 of them in private, individual settings. Needless to say, this has been a time of personal sadness, but also one of great grace.

Third, we will continue to try and reach out to victims-survivors, and invite them to utilize the outreach and mediation offered by the archdiocese. We try to be sensitive that some victims-survivors do not want to be contacted by the church, or that

uninvited contact might not be helpful to their own personal healing. Still, we will look for ways to continue to invite victims-survivors to be in contact with the church, to personally invite them into the new mediation system, and to talk with me, if they find that helpful.

Fourth, I will continue to involve the laity. From our Archdiocesan Review Board, composed of high-profile, no-nonsense professionals from the area; to our Community Advisory Board, made up of therapists, advocates, and victims-survivors; to our Finance Council, which oversees archdiocesan finances. I willingly and readily consult with lay leaders in the church (and some from without) who have much more expertise in these areas than I do.

Fifth, in partnership with this new process, I have asked our Community Advisory Board to conduct a thorough review of our office for Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response (formerly the Project Benjamin office). We have made significant changes in this area during the past year, but I want to make sure that we continue to address concerns of victims-survivors who tell us expanded or different services are necessary.

Sixth, months ago I released the names of all living priest-offenders to the proper law enforcement officials, and allowed those officials to review

individual files. At this time the best course may be to continue to listen to my advisory groups and others, and be open-minded about whether we should release the names to the media. Perhaps this is one area where the mediation process can help us find the right balance on a case-by-case basis.

Finally, to my knowledge, no priest or deacon with a substantiated claim of sexual abuse of a minor serves this archdiocese in any ministry, or is able to represent themselves as a priest or deacon. This is our policy ... period. And it is worth repeating.

Many have said people should look to the action of bishops, not just their words. I hope our actions will continue to speak louder than words and that we continue to listen and make efforts to restore trust.

I'm sure some will continue to criticize what we are doing as either "too much" or "too little." I can only hope and pray that people see this as an honest, sincere attempt at justice, charity, and compassion. I'm reminded how Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta replied when asked how she could ever help solve all the suffering of people in the world. "One person at a time," she answered.

Thanks for your support, patience, understanding, and prayers.