

January 2, 2004

Dear Friends in Christ,

The journey of the Magi to Christ was accompanied by a star, the very symbol of faith. Faith guides the Magi through difficulties and perils to the Source of light and life, Christ Jesus. In the past two years, the star of faith has had to guide us in the Catholic Church in the United States through some difficult, dark and perilous days. As we continue our journey of faith in this Diocese, I want to write to you at the beginning of this New Year on our efforts to be carefully vigilant in protecting our children and young people. The fact that we have had instances of sexual abuse of minors by a few members of the clergy has been painful for all of us. This is most especially true for victims of abuse. It has likewise affected priests, bishops and all of the faithful of all our Dioceses.

Since the meeting of the Bishops of the United States in Dallas in June of 2002 and the approval of what is called the Dallas Charter and the subsequent approval of the Norms of that Charter by the Holy See in December of 2002, our Diocese has sought to be faithful and in conformity with the letter and spirit of the Charter. Our pre-existing Review Board, comprised primarily of priests, was disbanded and replaced with a new Review Board consisting almost entirely of lay people. A victims' advocacy resource was identified with the selection of the Child Advocacy Center at Mercy Hospital in Sioux City; a safe environment program, named VIRTUS, has been implemented and 4,000 people have been trained thus far; background checks are now being done on all employees, clergy and diocesan staff, as well as volunteers who work with our young people.

The Diocese has also revised its Policy on the Abuse of Minors by Clergy and has instituted a Code of Professional and Ethical Conduct for all who work for or minister within the Diocese. The National Review Board of the United States Bishops' Conference performed an audit of all 195 Dioceses in the United States these past 6 months to make sure that each diocese is in conformity with the Dallas Charter. The two independent auditors who worked in our diocese were both retired F.B.I. agents and non-Catholic. Their report will be part of the national Gavin Audit Report that will be published this coming week. It will indicate that the Diocese of Sioux City is in full compliance with the Charter.

One further aspect of the Dallas Charter is the provision for two further studies: one, a statistical study on numbers, and a second one, on the deeper causes of this phenomenon. That statistical study, done in aggregate numbers, will be most probably published in late February. Prior to the national release of that study in February, I would like to share with you the story of the Diocese of Sioux City.

Since 1950, our Diocese has received 33 allegations of sexual abuse of a minor against 10 priests. During that same time, 545 priests and deacons have served the people of the Diocese. Of those ten identified with credible allegations, six have died, one has left the priesthood, one is in a supervised setting, and two have had their priestly duties suspended and are subject to further canonical penalties.

During that same period, a total of \$235,061 has been spent on settlements, treatment and counseling for victims and priests. Of that total, \$43,790 has been covered by insurance with the diocese assuming the remaining \$191,271. These costs came from unrestricted endowment earnings and donations made to the diocese. No funds that were designated for other church-related purposes such as D.A.A., A Time to Remember, and Centennial Campaign for Excellence or weekend mass collections were used to pay any of these costs.

We will share this information with the news media next week however we wanted to make sure the faithful of the diocese were the first to hear the report. This is uncomfortable news for all of us, but it is important that we are all fully aware of the history of our diocese and how we are fixing this problem. Even one allegation is one too many and I express anew my deep sorrow and sincere apologies for all wrongs done to any victims by any of our priests. I repeat my sincere offer for any victims to come forward and let me know how I can provide the pastoral care that is so desperately needed.

There is no reality as important as that of protecting our youth and young people. The dark skies we have been living in these past months as a whole Church in the United States makes the Star of faith all the more a focus of our attention and makes a clearer path for us to be purified, renewed and guided in our journey.

God bless each of you this Christmas season. Let's join in asking the Christ Child for strength and healing.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,