

Chicago
July 29, 2003

To the Catholic Faithful of the United States:

One year ago we met for the first time as the National Review Board to assist the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in addressing the clerical sex abuse scandal. Acting in the midst of a crisis without precedent in the history of the Church in America, the bishops had established the board as part of the charter they adopted in Dallas in June 2002 to protect children and young people from any repetition of the horrors then coming to light. We convened as strangers, diverse in backgrounds and experience, but united in a love for the Church and determined to do our part in safeguarding her and her young.

In the beginning we spent endless hours educating ourselves in order to achieve an adequate understanding of the sources of the trouble, of the tragic toll it had exacted from the innocent young and their families, and of the frequently dismaying history of the Church's responses. Only then were we able to establish a program of work that would fulfill the role envisioned for us in the Dallas charter. In drawing this blueprint, we first resolved that in order to establish credibility for our actions we had to operate with independence and transparency. We could not be seen as mere window dressing or a public relations response to a gnawing embarrassment. Indeed we believed that to be a source of healing and reform, we had to produce promptly a plan for meaningful and robust measures directed against the sin and crime devastating the Church.

Given these ambitious goals, we have spent the past 12 months immersing ourselves in this work. At least monthly we have gathered as a board in various parts of the country but we have met far more frequently in subcommittees to tackle specific tasks. Of equal importance, we have read numerous books, documents and articles to educate ourselves on the complexities of the crisis and have conducted meetings and interviews with scores of knowledgeable observers. What began as a volunteer assignment has become an almost full-time endeavor that frequently crowds out other duties from busy schedules.

Now, as we observe the first anniversary of our founding, we want to make an accounting of our stewardship to our fellow Catholics and others of good will. We know that much of our agenda has yet to be accomplished. But we believe that for real change, our prescriptions must go to the root of the troubles if their effects are to be lasting. Change is never easy for either individuals or organizations and the inevitable obstacles which block one's way can be formidable to overcome. But we are united in an unshakeable resolve to help the Church mend itself and reassure its members. For us to succeed, we need your patience and your prayers.

Here then is a status report on the six major goals set by the board in response to the Dallas charter:

Establish an Office for Child and Youth Protection: A special task force of the board conducted an exhaustive three-month national search that resulted in the hiring in December of Kathleen McChesney, who was willing to retire as the third highest ranking official of the FBI and the bureau's highest ranking woman to undertake this key assignment as executive director

of the new office established by the bishops. The leadership, energy and resolve she has brought to the task have proved invaluable. We believe that in her we have fulfilled the board's stated goal of finding the very highest qualified person in the country for the job. Ms. McChesney has met personally with most of the nation's bishops and scores of diocesan officials, has listened to the pleas of the voiceless and has set up the first-ever audit of the 195 dioceses in the United States to determine whether and exactly how they are complying with the Dallas charter. To assist her as deputy director of the office, she recruited Sheila Horan, former FBI deputy assistant director for counterintelligence. With their law enforcement backgrounds, they represent a no-nonsense treasure of expertise about investigative procedures, accountability and compliance. The charter makes it the board's responsibility to assist and monitor their activities.

Establish Safe Environment Standards: Article 8 of the charter called for the Office for Child and Youth Protection to implement "safe environment" programs that would guarantee the safety of any child in a Church setting. Jane Chiles, a member of this board, headed a sub-committee that worked with Ms. McChesney and consulted national resources expert in this field. The result is a set of state-of-the-art guidelines sent to the nation's dioceses for creating safe environment programs which ensure that children and youth who worship, study or participate in church-sponsored activities can do so in the safest and most secure settings possible. This program includes assistance to dioceses in establishing written codes of conduct for church personnel, the essential cornerstone for any safe environment policy; in conducting background investigations, and in setting up comprehensive training programs to orient all personnel involved in work with children. To help speed the implementation of this program, the subcommittee also spotlighted programs already proved effective around the country that can serve as models for other dioceses.

Audit the Nation's Dioceses/Eparchies to Determine Compliance with the Dallas Charter: To carry out this major responsibility of determining compliance with standards set forth in the Dallas charter, Ms. McChesney's office retained the services of the Gavin Group, a Boston-based independent firm headed by William Gavin, a retired FBI official. Working under Mr. Gavin are 54 auditors, experienced and professional in their backgrounds in law enforcement and certified public accounting. Their work, in turn, is being monitored and validated by Wilfred Quigley of Philadelphia, retired partner of the auditing firm of Ernst & Young. The goal is to visit each of the 195 dioceses/eparchies and to determine whether adequate practices and procedures are in place to comply with the guarantees made by the bishops in Dallas. The auditors are looking at the adequacy of such things as policies for responding to abuse complaints, outreach programs for victims of abuse, the independence and use of lay review boards, policies for removing priests who have abused the innocent, safe environment programs and many other facets of the commitment to cleanse the Church of these scandals at every level. To prepare the bishops and their staffs for this thoroughgoing look at their operations, a series of 13 training workshops was held across the country to detail the process. The audits began in June 2003. Divided into teams of two and four, the auditors are visiting approximately 11 dioceses per week and have covered 31 dioceses to date. By early fall their work will be completed and Ms. McChesney will begin the major task of compiling the results and preparing her first annual report. This report will then go to the National Review Board, which is monitoring the process and will make any appropriate recommendations rising from the audit's findings. The schedule calls for the finished work to be forwarded to Bishop Wilton Gregory, USCCB president, sometime in December and to be made

public at that time. Not as a threat but rather as discharging the instructions given to the board by the bishops themselves in Dallas, the board is prepared to name those dioceses/eparchies "not in compliance with the provisions and expectations" of the Charter. The goal, once again, is transparency so that the Catholic faithful can gain a full measure of confidence from the results.

Commission a Descriptive Study of the "Nature and Scope" of the Crisis: Article 9 of the Dallas charter instructed the National Review Board to commission this study, "including such data as statistics on perpetrators and victims." A puzzling dimension of the scandal is that no accurate statistical snapshot had ever been taken over decades of the number of offending priests, the number of youthful victims and the financial cost to the Church. This led to mounting accusations of secrecy and stonewalling. In the firm belief that only when the full truth is made known, however painful the findings, will credibility be restored, the board searched for the most qualified agency in the nation to conduct the study to guarantee unbiased results. Attracted by the school's impeccable credentials, the board retained the services of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, a part of the university system of the city of New York. Although the Dallas charter pledged "full cooperation" on the part of the bishops, there was initial resistance to participation in some quarters for a variety of reasons. Those barriers have now been largely removed and the John Jay research team is receiving information from cooperating bishops at an increasing rate. As of July 10th, approximately two-thirds of the dioceses/eparchies/male religious communities have completed one or both parts of the survey. This figure will doubtless rise in the coming weeks as a backlog of returns received to meet an initial June 30th deadline are processed and encrypted by a third-party auditor to assure confidentiality. Some extensions are being granted to dioceses that have applied for more time, especially larger dioceses where the collection of needed data is particularly burdensome. The John Jay research team has expressed its satisfaction with the present rate of cooperation and expects the results, when finalized, to reflect the historic situation in the vast majority of dioceses/eparchies since 1950, although not in all. The lengthy process of analyzing the data and producing the required statistical picture will then follow. It is expected that the work will be completed and the long-awaited results of the study made public early in 2004 as an important part of the causes and context analysis being conducted by the board.

Commission a Comprehensive Study of the Causes and Context of the Crisis: Article 9 of the Dallas charter asked the board to undertake this second study "to understand the problem more fully and to enhance the effectiveness of our future responses." The board views this phase of its work as perhaps the most critical, the most time consuming and the most difficult. The causes of the epidemic of clerical sex abuse are many and complicated and no easy explanations for the outbreak are available. Nonetheless, our judgment cannot be paralyzed by the complexity of the problem facing us. Consequently the board plans to address the "causes and context" issue in a two- phase fashion:

Causes and Context Phase I — A task force headed by Robert Bennett, an experienced Washington lawyer and a member of this board, has undertaken the initial phase of an inquiry, which, when completed, will render the board's consensus view of the causes of the crisis. Over recent months the task force members have conducted extensive interviews from a number of sources who are in positions to have experienced various aspects of the crisis. They have taken testimony from cardinals, archbishops and bishops; from representatives of religious orders;

from victims and their representatives; from priest perpetrators; from law enforcement officials; from seminary leaders and recent seminarians; from canon law authorities; from physicians and authorities in psychiatric treatment; from authors and researchers; and from others who possess certain expertise in facets of the problem. This exhaustive process continues. The board anticipates that the task force report will be made public early in 2004.

Causes and Context Phase II -- Once the "nature and scope" findings are available and the board's own Phase I research has been accomplished, the foundation will have been laid for a further and more detailed study into the causes and context, particularly on those issues which require broad-based statistical data and analysis before conclusions can be firmly reached. The second phase permitting this more analytic assessment of the crisis will require several years to complete and to cost upwards of \$4 million. It would be undertaken by secular academic institutions with special expertise in the field. A "**request for proposal**" is presently being developed by the board and is scheduled to be issued to interested parties by year's end. Initial approaches have been made to foundations that may be interested in funding such an ambitious project. It should draw widespread interest in light of the growing concern in American society, not just in the Catholic Church, with the extent of sexual abuse of children and its dreadful consequences on these victims.

This, then, is a summary of the work of the National Review Board during its first year. The board is grateful for the leadership lent in the early stages of our formation by Gov. Frank Keating, who resigned recently from the board. We wish to make clear that the work of the board has proceeded uninterrupted and with continued vigor and independence. The course we have charted remains unchanged. We are capably led by Justice Anne M. Burke, of Chicago, our former vice-chairperson who has been formally designated by Bishop Gregory as interim chair. An outgrowth of our work together over the past year has been an extraordinary bonding, unique in our experience, that has united us in a singular common pursuit despite our different backgrounds and perspectives. Our ultimate goal remains a Church cleansed of scandal, secure for the young and reunited in holiness. You may be assured that it is to that noble purpose that we dedicate our efforts.