



DECEMBER 13, 2003

MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

As we approach Christmas and the birth of the Son of God as a human being, we are reminded that we belong to a Church that is both human and divine. Because of the sexual abuse scandals revealed these past several years, we have seen the Church's humanity at its worst. From a spiritual perspective, we can consider this struggle as a graced moment—a time of purification. It is my hope that what the Church is doing to remedy this situation can be a model for other institutions, so that children everywhere can be protected.

Ever since the Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (www.usccb.org) established five principles in November, 1994, to address the evil of sexual abuse of minors, the Diocese of Beaumont has been making a concerted effort to implement those principles and continues to maintain a safe environment for children and young people, as well as adults. The diocese is equally committed to the well-being of the community and to the integrity of the Church's ministry. I want to point out a few of our major efforts.

1. After much work, the diocese implemented its first "Ethical and Responsible Conduct Policies" on July 1, 1996, and a series of orientation sessions were held throughout the diocese during the next eight months for clergy, employees, and volunteers addressing the ethical policies and the sexual boundaries of the pastoral relationship.

2. Although there has been a Vocations Board in place for many years to assist in the screening process of applicants for the seminary, the Board was expanded in 1999 and the process was improved.

3. Written materials have been mailed or emailed to clergy, seminarians, and others on matters such as: adult consensual relationships, conducting background checks, screening of employees and volunteers, misconduct issues, knowing the warning signs of child abuse, dealing with harassment.

4. We have utilized our Catholic newspaper, the East Texas Catholic, to communicate with our Catholic faithful about these ethical policies and the efforts of the Church to address the church scandal, particularly the past two years.

5. In response to the USCCB Charter and Norms, the diocese has revised and expanded our Ethical Policies, established a Diocesan Review Board to assist me in assessing allegations of sexual abuse, and recently implemented Virtus' "Adults Protecting God's Children" training program.

6. Our diocesan website (www.dioceseofbmt.org) has also made available to the broader public information about these efforts. The website now has a new section, "Safe Environment", which openly explains what we are doing to maintain a safe environment for children and young

people and what mechanisms are now in place to address situations as they arise.

As your Bishop, I apologize to you for those times when the Church failed in the past to respond appropriately to victims and offenders. I want to work with all of you to make sure that our Church is accountable, compassionate, and just in dealing with these painful situations. As a Church family, we also reach out to those who have been victimized in any way by representatives of the Church and offer spiritual and pastoral assistance for their healing and restoration. In reaching out to those who suffer, we apologize to them for the harm that has been inflicted upon them.

One of the provisions of the USCCB Charter (Art. 9) provides for commissioning a descriptive study of the nature and scope of the problem in the Catholic Church, including such data as statistics on perpetrators, victims, and costs incurred. This study is currently being done by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and covers the past 50 years up to 2002. The Diocese of Beaumont has fully cooperated with that study. Since the Diocese of Beaumont was created in 1966, the statistics that we submitted only covered the years 1966 - 2002.

In a spirit of openness and transparency, I want to release the statistics for the Diocese of Beaumont at this time. From 1966 - 2002, we have had approximately 313 clergy (priests and permanent deacons) ministering within the diocese. Of this number, we have established from our records credible allegations that 5 diocesan priests and 1 seminarian have abused minors during this time period. The 5 priests represent 1.6% of the 313 clerics who served in the diocese from 1966-2002, but the percentage increases to 1.9% when the one seminarian is also included. Of the 5 priests, two are deceased, and three are no longer in ministry. Regarding the seminarian, we revoked our sponsorship of him, and he was dismissed from the Seminary shortly after we confirmed the allegation that was made in late summer, 2001, and reported to civil authorities. As you know, there have also been false allegations.

The incidents of abuse by clergy that were reported occurred between the years of 1962 - 1994. No abuse of minors by clergy has been reported to have occurred in the past 9-10 years. It is hoped that the concerted efforts of the diocese to maintain a safe environment, as noted above, and the improved formation in seminaries have contributed to this positive result.

The number of reported victims/survivors of these 5 priests and 1 seminarian is 8. All of these persons were minors (under age 18) at the time the abuse occurred. Of the 8, one was female and the others were male.

From 1966 - 2002, approximately \$140,210 has been paid by the diocese in settlements,

counseling, and legal fees. None of these monies came from restricted funds, which are used only for the purpose(s) for which they were intended by the donors, such as the Bishop's Faith Appeal. Monies paid by the diocese came from accumulated reserves that are used for contingency expenses. I also want to assure you that the Diocese of Beaumont has not forwarded any of its monies to the Archdiocese of Boston or any other (arch)diocese to assist with the costs related to their abuse cases.

Since 2002, the case of the one seminarian reported above was settled for \$215,000. Of that amount, \$100,000 came from diocesan funds. Legal fees were also reimbursed by our diocesan insurance. Also, a credible allegation was received from an adult who was abused as a minor over 20 years ago by a diocesan priest who is now deceased. The diocese is currently providing counseling for that adult.

In the September 26, 2003 issue of the East Texas Catholic I reported on the completed audit of the diocese's compliance with the USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. My report was also released to the major local newspapers and television stations for notification to the general public. The final result of that audit is that we are now in full compliance with the Charter.

Also in the East Texas Catholic, beginning with the October 27, 2003 issue, we are devoting at least a full page to "Safe Environment". Periodically you will find on that page, and on the Spanish page, a statement encouraging survivors of sexual abuse by clergy or other church personnel to come forward for assistance. This is yet another way to reach out to those who are hurting and in need of healing.

The vast majority of priests have only one wish, and that is to help you grow closer to Jesus through the celebration of the Word of God and the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. They wish to collaborate with you in the education and formation of your children. Vatican II said that the Church, as she goes on her pilgrim way, is in continual need of purification because she is made up of men and women here on earth. Throughout her 2000 years of history, she has gone through purifying times. She always emerges much clearer about her mission in the world. This, I believe, is such a moment for the Church.

It is my hope that all of us who minister and serve in the name of the Church will be models of right conduct, ceaseless prayer, and fidelity to our baptismal call to discipleship.

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SINCERELY IN CHRIST,

MOST REVEREND CURTIS J. GUILLORY, SVD, DD
BISHOP OF BEAUMONT