

SPECIAL REPORT
Responding to Complaints of
Sexual Misconduct

April 2002

And miles to go

by Bishop John C. Nienstedt

The joy of this wondrous Easter Season has been somewhat diminished for me this year because of the clergy scandal rocking Boston and other Catholic dioceses. I must confess I have a heavy heart in reading reports about all this. I became a priest to help, not to take advantage of God's people. I presumed every other priest did the same. To learn of the number of victims that have suffered from child abuse by clergy is more than shocking, it sickens me.

Science tells us that the disease of pedophilia or ephebophilia is based in an arrested sexual identity. The pedophile or ephebophile is not necessarily homosexual; he might prey on girls or boys depending on their availability. Like the unreformed alcoholic in the presence of a drink, he is tempted sexually in the presence of a child or an adolescent. And, like the unreformed alcoholic, he will go to great lengths to hide his desires. We are talking about compulsive behavior here.

It is important to point out that a very small percentage of priests are involved in this perverse activity. Yet, even one case of child abuse by a clergyman is one too many. As one Boston priest noted, it is as if one of our own has driven through a mud puddle and all of us as priests have been covered with grime. This is indeed unfortunate. Evil does have an extended reach.

The other half of the equation is the allegation that bishops have moved priests who are charged with such crimes from parish to parish, seemingly unconcerned with the children who were placed in harm's way. I have worked closely with three archbishops. I know that none of them would have been so callous. I do not intend to excuse any bishop who might have been, but I think it is helpful to explain that in the 1950s the world thought this kind of activity was a moral failure. It could be resolved by confession, penance and a disciplined will. In the 1980s, it was still thought that psychotherapy could resolve the issue. Now we know, only too late, that some cases are not curable.

What is of immediate concern, I believe, is a social climate that presumes every unsubstantiated charge is necessarily true. I remember well the months after the late Cardinal Bernardin was publicly accused. Day after day, the press followed him wherever he went. The pressure must have been enormous. Then came the hour when his accuser confessed that he was mistaken. All's well that ends well, but what about the suffering needlessly endured in the meantime? Already one Boston priest seems to be living that nightmare.

It is essential somehow to repair the breach caused by this terrible scandal. I have asked our Priests' Council to review our procedures for handling complaints so that we can respond quickly, yet fairly, to protect the rights of the accuser and the accused until the truth is discovered. We are fortunate in this diocese to have had a sexual misconduct policy in place since 1990, which was revised again in 1994. The policy gives a structured procedure wherein complaints can be handled by a Review Board already in place. Overall, the policy seeks to "promote healing where there is injury, guidance when it is called for, change when it is

warranted, with firm justice and mercy toward all and a determination to do what is needed to correct and prevent sexual misconduct." It also calls for the careful adherence to all relevant State laws and regulations.

Again, one has to hope that the actions of a few will not cast doubt on the good work of many. Priests cannot exclude the youth of the diocese from the attention they deserve in participating fully in the life of the church. Inspiring the young to respond to God's call as a priest or religious must not take a back seat on our collective journey of faith. The message of Jesus requires us to trust the messenger. Where suspicion reigns, we must work with resolve to rebuild a sense of trust.

I ask you, then, not to lose faith in your priests or in the priesthood itself. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that every priest "is able to deal patiently with erring sinners, for he himself is beset by weakness and so must make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people." (Heb. 5:2-3) The call to conversion is aimed at every member of the church, bishops and priests as well.

Please pray for the priests you have known and for all priests. Pray, too, that this dark moment in the church's life may not impede her mission of being the Body of Christ and the source of salvation to all people.

And finally, I ask my brother priests to join me daily in this prayer from St. Ignatius Loyola:

Dear Lord,

Teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve you as you deserve: To give and not to count the cost, To fight and not to heed the wounds, To toil and not to seek for rest, To labor and to ask for no reward,

Save that of knowing that I do your will, Oh God.

God love you!

Falta Mucho por Recorrer

Por el obispo John C. Nienstedt

Este año la alegría de esta temporada maravilloso de la Pascua se ha disminuido un poco en mí debido al escándalo eclesiástico en Boston y en otras diócesis. Debo confesar que me aflige leer informes de esa naturaleza. Me ordené sacerdote para ayudar, más no para abusar del pueblo de Dios. Yo presumo que cada que otro sacerdote hizo lo mismo. Al enterarme del número de víctimas que han padecido de este abuso infantil por el clero, es más que estremecedor, me disgusta.

La ciencia nos dice que la enfermedad pedofilia o epebofilia esta basada en una aprisionada identidad sexual. Pedofilia o epebofilia no es necesariamente homosexual. El sujeto podría atacar a niños y niñas dependiendo de su disponibilidad. Como un alcohólico al presenciar una bebida alcohólica, el sujeto es tentado sexualmente al presenciar un niño/a o un adolescente. Y, como el alcohólico, hará cualquier cosa para esconder sus deseos. Aquí estamos hablando sobre la conducta compulsiva.

De alguna manera es esencial reparar la ruptura causado por este escándalo tan terrible. Pedi al Concilio de Sacerdotes repasar nuestros procedimientos de tratar las quejas, a tal grado de estar listos a responder rápidamente, no obstante justo, para proteger los derechos del acusador y el acusado hasta que la verdad se descubra. Desde 1990, afortunadamente nuestra Diócesis posee una regla de malconducta sexual. En 1994 se hicieron algunas modificaciones. Esta regla tiene un procedimiento muy estructurado donde las quejas pueden ser tratados por un Panel de Consulta ya escogido. En conjunto, esta regla busca "promover cura dónde hay daño, orientación cuando es requerida, con cambio cuando sea necesario, con justicia firme y compasión hacia todos y una determinación para hacer lo que sea necesario para corregir y prevenir la malconducta sexual." También requiere de una adherencia cuidadosa de todas las leyes estatales y regulaciones.

Les pido que oren por los sacerdotes que en algún momento dado conoció y por todos los sacerdotes. Ore, también, para que este momento de penumbra en la vida de la iglesia no impida su misión de ser el cuerpo de Cristo y la fuente de la salvación para todos.

Committed to promoting healing, guidance, and change with justice

by Father Douglas L. Grams, Chancellor

Diocese of New Ulm

As a diocesan church, we have responded to sexual misconduct by following a comprehensive policy that was implemented in 1990. We are committed to promoting healing where the trust between priests and members of the Christian faithful have been painfully broken.

During the past 50 years, the church - with the rest of society - has slowly come to an understanding of sexual misconduct and understandably our response to this problem is in question. Today, as a Church we are doing more than many institutions to develop a pastoral response to address the problem.

As a local church comprised of 82 parishes, we have a policy dealing with issues of sexual misconduct. We continue to educate, provide advocacy and healing opportunities for victims, and treatment for perpetrators. Our policy was revised in 1994 and was made available to each of the parishes in the diocese as well as to the media. In 1995 a section entitled Building Healthy Relationships was added to cover the needs of Catholic Schools, Religious Education Programs and Youth Ministry Programs. We are also presently re-examining our policy to ensure that our response is current and that no revisions are needed.

We admit that people have been hurt through the human weakness of some priests and other church personnel. We are making a good faith effort to heal any trust that has been broken. As we strive to be imitators of Christ's love for the Church, we want to ensure healthy relationships between priests and the people they serve.

Our policy consists of a delegate appointed by the bishop, who oversees the process when an accusation is made. There is a review board made up of professionals from across the diocese. These professionals include: people employed in the fields of counseling, psychology, psychiatry, medicine, social work, and church work. Trained advocates and advisors are provided for the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator. After a period of inquiry the review board makes a recommendation to the bishop concerning the evidence. During the entire process advocates are provided for all concerned to ensure that pastoral needs are met while following the procedures outlined in our policy.

As pastoral leaders, we are required to respond honestly to the victims, the accused, and the public. If a charge of sexual misconduct is substantiated, appropriate and timely actions are taken. Our policy also emphasizes accountability to the public through the appropriate release of accurate information to news media managers. This level of accountability also helps to serve as a deterrent of inappropriate behaviors as well as for false accusations. Issues of sexual misconduct challenge every member of the church, especially the leaders, to create an environment where healthy boundaries are established and respected.

As a diocese, we are committed to responding to claims of sexual misconduct and to provide healing where there is injury.

If you would like a copy of our sexual misconduct policy, call or write the Pastoral Center of the Diocese of New Ulm. A summary of our sexual misconduct procedure can be found on the Diocesan web site www.dnu.org.

Reports of sexual misconduct are made to the Bishop's Delegate for Sexual Misconduct

When a complaint or allegation of sexual misconduct involving a priest, deacon, or pastoral administrator is made to the diocese, Father Frank Garvey, the Bishop's Delegate for Sexual Misconduct, is the individual who handles the responsibility for supervising this important process of seeking justice and healing. Father Garvey was recently appointed to this position in June, 2000, following his predecessor Eugene Burke who served as the official delegate during the establishment of the diocesan policy on Sexual Misconduct in the Church during the early 90's.

The role of the delegate is key in establishing a fair and pastoral process. The tasks of the delegate are many including: advocacy training; establishing and coordinating a Pastoral Center response team; maintaining contact with complainants and their treatment; monitoring treatment and aftercare; and representing the Bishop in dealing with insurance companies and legal processes.

On assuming the role of delegate Father Garvey commented, "I was happy to find that our diocese had an updated, very detailed policy and procedure manual relating to all forms of sexual misconduct." He added, "I am also happy to report that in the almost two years that I have been in this position there were no reported cases or incidents of sexual misconduct."

Although Father Garvey has not had to implement the procedures outlined in the policy he carefully reviews the steps explaining the importance of accountability, "It is my responsibility to meet with the person making the accusation (possible victim) and the person accused. Then, working with advocates and our review board, a thorough investigation is made in a timely manner. Depending on the findings, we look at what help is needed for the victim as well as possible treatment for the accused." Father Garvey recalled that during the establishment of the diocesan policy in 1990, Bishop Lucker wrote to pastoral leaders emphasizing that the diocesan policy and procedures on sexual misconduct were a positive statement of our beliefs and values. He wrote, "We are openly acknowledging that sexual misconduct sometime happens within the church. . .the planned response is thorough, open, accountable and includes everyone touched by the problem. Above all, our approach is pastoral."

Since Father Garvey has held the position of delegate no cases have been reported to the diocese. In addition he stated that, " All cases that have been reported prior to my appointment as delegate have been acknowledged and resolved."

In an ongoing effort to keep pastoral leaders informed about sexual misconduct issues, Father Garvey requires leaders to review sexual harassment training materials and complete a written evaluation form annually.

Seminarians are carefully screened throughout formation period

by Father Brian Oestreich, Director

Office of Vocations

Not every candidate who applies to the diocese is accepted as a seminarian. When a man applies to the formation program for the Diocese of New Ulm he is required to fulfill a series of pre-requirements and participate in various screening examinations.

When a man expresses interest in the priesthood he first will participate in a behavioral assessment conducted by the Diocesan Vocation Director. If the behavioral assessment has a favorable outcome the candidate will be invited to continue his application process. After several interviews and supervised ministry experiences the candidate is then welcome to apply to a seminary program.

An essential element of the seminary application process is psychological screening. Currently the Diocese of New Ulm requires each seminarian to undergo a battery of psychological tests. The tests include but are not limited to; The Saint Luke Institute Psychosexual Inventory, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, Measure of Psychosocial Development, Million Clinical Multi-axial Inventory, Strong Interest Inventory and the Rorschach Ink blot test. A substantial effort is made during the screening process to determine if the candidate is able to demonstrate the ability to live a chaste and celibate lifestyle.

After the psychological tests have been administered a licensed psychologist will offer a complete evaluation of the seminarian including a summary and recommendation. This information is then shared with the diocese and the seminary staff. From this information areas of growth are indicated for the seminary formation program.

Throughout his formation and discernment the seminarian participates in various growth seminars and continuing education. A one-on-one relationship is developed with an advisor who challenges and guides the seminarian toward quality formation experiences. The seminarian also meets with a spiritual director twice a month. Between these two professionals the seminarian addresses many life and formation issues.

During this formation period the seminarian is annually asked to compile a list of goals and objectives that will be key aspects of his formation for that year. These goals and objectives are then used to evaluate the seminarian's growth and potential for ministry. The seminarian is evaluated various times throughout the year and a formal evaluation is held in the spring of each year with the seminary staff, the seminarian and the Vocation Director. It is during these evaluations that decisions are made pertaining to the seminarian's future formation.

This all-encompassing program is used to look for indicators of healthy behaviors and true desire for ministry in the church.

While quantity of seminarians is desired, the quality of seminarians is much more vital in the church today.