

Abuse-prevention efforts 'on course'

I have written to you regularly during the past two years on the issue of sexual abuse of children and young people by church personnel. I have done so because I believe firmly in clear and consistent communication on this issue, which has caused so much pain for the victims and for all in our church who care so deeply about our youth and vulnerable adults.

Further, I believe that keeping you informed of our progress will help in the healing process, as well as arm all of us with the knowledge we need to attack this issue not just in our church, but also in the larger American society where, sadly, sexual abuse is widespread.

In this spirit, I want to share with you today news that I believe affirms we are very much on the right course as we strive to create a safe and holy environment for all in the Church of Rochester:

Following an audit by the independent Gavin Group of Boston, our diocese has again been found to be in full compliance with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

The audit, which the USCCB authorized to be conducted in all U.S. dioceses and eparchies in 2004, is a follow-up to one conducted last fall. In that first audit, we also were found to be in compliance. Both findings are important because in each review the auditors have provided objective analysis and independent critique of our local work on this issue.

You will recall that the charter, which the nation's Catholic bishops adopted in 2002, requires that each diocese of the United States initiate specific actions to create safe environments. Among these are background checks of priests, seminarians, employees and volunteers; awareness training and public outreach; and well-communicated stan-



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

dards of behavior for people in positions of trust.

The charter also directs action in the following areas: healing and reconciliation of victims and survivors; prompt and effective response to allegations; cooperation with civil authorities; disciplining offenders; and providing for means of accountability through a national Office of Child and Youth Protection and a National Review Board.

Our diocese was found to be in full compliance with all of these stringent requirements in the most recent audit conducted the week of Sept. 13-17 by two retired Federal Bureau of Investigation agents now working for the Gavin Group. The auditors, who spent a week in our diocese, reviewed not only our policies and practices in such areas as training, prevention and outreach, but also interviewed several diocesan officials directly responsible for overseeing fulfillment of the provisions of the charter, including me.

In addition, the auditors also interviewed past victims of abuse and some members of our independent review board, which is chaired by retired Monroe County Sheriff Andrew P. Meloni Jr. The nine-member review board was established locally to investigate allegations of sexual misconduct and abuse and advise me on these matters.

The Gavin Group reported to the diocese it found that, in keeping with the requirements of the charter, the

diocese has a working policy on the prevention of the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and "well-publicized" standards of ministerial behavior. The auditors also found that we do provide needed outreach and assistance through meetings and other services, and that we properly communicate the method of making a complaint.

The Gavin Group also reported that we have established proper mechanisms to ensure prompt response when abuse is reported. In addition, the report said the diocese has been found to be in full compliance with not only canonical procedures involving investigation and disposition of allegations, but also civil laws. Finally, the auditors determined that the diocese has established an effective and cooperative liaison with law-enforcement officials.

Of course, the audit is an affirmation, but not an end, to the work ahead, which continues and grows. Please know that we are fully committed to ensuring that we promote healing and reconciliation, guarantee effective response to allegations and protect the faithful in the future.

As a way of continuing our outreach, we will present on Dec. 4 our second Day of Hope and Healing for victims of sexual abuse by clergy and members of the victims' families. This quiet day of reflection will be at St. Patrick Church Parish Center in Victor. I will be present at that gathering. Meanwhile, I have continued to meet individually with victims of abuse whenever they have felt such a meeting would be helpful to them.

Other work goes on. You will be interested to know that our diocese has conducted more than 12,000 background checks and thousands of hours of training with people who work and minister professionally in the church and the kind and generous people who volunteer in scores of programs at every parish, our Catholic schools and other ministries. That training will continue. I thank all of you for your understanding and cooperation in this cru-

HOW TO GET HELP

Victims of abuse always have a right to report to the civil authorities.

To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Diocese of Rochester, victims are encouraged to contact the victims' assistance coordinators appointed by Bishop Clark: Barbara Pedeville: 585/328-3228, ext. 1215, or 800/388-7177, ext. 1215; or Father Robert Ring, 315/730-0882.

cial, ongoing effort. (Those interested can view our training video at www.dor.org under the Creating a Safe Environment section, where you will also find historical statistics, our Code of Conduct and other important information, including how to reach our victims' assistance coordinators.)

In addition, we are working on a special program that will help parents understand the issue better and educate their children — all with the goal of keeping them safe.

I must also add that some of you may be wondering, "why does the bishop keep talking about this issue and writing about it? There already has been so much bad news in the media about the Catholic Church."

I understand this reaction. But while it is true that we have had no additional priests accused of sexual misconduct in more than a year, we owe it to ourselves as a faith community striving to be holy, to the victims of the past and to the most vulnerable among us to keep the issue in front of us.

Having learned from the past, now let us be the force and example for change and awareness — not only in our church, but in all of our society, so that our children and all those who are vulnerable will be better protected no matter where they go.

We must promise them that.

Peace to all.

One in Faith, One in Knowledge, One in Community



ALL SAINTS
Catholic Academy

All Saints Catholic Academy will hold an

OPEN HOUSE

on Thursday, December 9, 2004 at 7:00 p.m.
Students from grades 5 through 7 are invited to attend.

For information please call

585-429-6010

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Calling all writers, musicians, videographers

In its December monthly issue, the *Catholic Courier* will publish a list of diocesan individuals or groups who have produced books, music tapes and CDs, and videos in 2004.

If you or someone you know released such a work this year, send us in writing by noon on Nov. 16 the name(s) of the author(s)/performer(s), the name and brief description of the work and a contact number in case we have any questions.

Please keep in mind we need submissions — in writing — by noon on Nov. 16.

Send to: E-mail: newsroom@catholiccourier.com or Catholic Courier, PO Box 24379, Rochester, NY 14624