

**A VOTF National Representative Council Resolution on
Protecting Our Children and Reaching Out to Survivors and Their Families
Version 5.20—March 19, 2007**

The Roman Catholic Church is in crisis over sexual abuse of minors by priests and the cover up of those crimes by bishops. In the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, the United States bishops pledged to protect our children and to reach out and listen to the victims/survivors of clerical sexual abuse and to their families. To date, many bishops have not fully implemented these pledges.

Protecting Our Children—Full Disclosure. Because sexual abusers seldom abuse only once, to adequately protect children—and vulnerable adults—requires that the community have full disclosure of information about proven abusers, admitted abusers, and those suspended or dismissed based on sufficient credible evidence of sexual abuse.

Because of our desire for justice and because Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) supports priests of integrity as one of its three major corporate goals, we appeal to bishops and their lay advisory boards to be sensitive to the risk of false accusation, and we call for diligence, fairness, and transparency in the process that assesses the veracity of allegations against any suspected abuser. However, to provide a prudent safeguard to protect children, we call for full disclosure of information about proven abusers, admitted abusers, and those priests, deacons, and laypersons suspended or dismissed from active ministry, employment, or volunteer activities because sufficient evidence of sexual abuse exists.

Our call for this disclosure is not breaking new ground. To date, less than 10% of the 195 dioceses have provided public disclosure of information about abusers. This record needs significant improvement. The protection of our children and vulnerable adults demands it, and the restoration of the bishops' trust and credibility requires it. Continued secrecy only contributes to the impression that the Church is sheltering criminals.

Therefore, bishops should provide full, public disclosure of information about those under their authority, both clerical and lay (priests, deacons, lay employees, and volunteers), who are proven abusers, admitted abusers, and those persons that the bishop, with the confidential consultative support of a predominantly lay review board, has suspended or dismissed from active ministry, employment, or volunteer activities because sufficient credible evidence of sexual abuse exists. This information should be provided permanently on official, user-friendly, and easily accessible Church websites and other public media and should, at a minimum, include:

1. The name, address, and/or current whereabouts of all proven abusers, admitted abusers, and those suspended or dismissed from active ministry, employment, or volunteer activities, including those disclosed in the John Jay Report (data 1950-2002) and in all other sources.
2. The assignment history, including dates and places, of all proven abusers, admitted abusers, and those suspended or dismissed from active ministry, employment, or volunteer activities because sufficient evidence of sexual abuse exists. This information should include where each person served at the time of the announcement, if any, of his or her removal from active ministry or other Church work.

3. Adequate provision for removal of the names of any persons reinstated after suspension or dismissal from active ministry, employment, or volunteer activities because of alleged abuse, and appropriate dissemination of such information.
4. The current status of all cases that have been submitted to the Vatican of proven abusers, admitted abusers, and those suspended or dismissed from active ministry.
5. All agreements between Church officials and proven abusers, admitted abusers, and those suspended or dismissed from active ministry, employment, or volunteer activities, including information about financial support, retirement and health care benefits, any restrictions on the place of residence, any restrictions on freedom of travel or interaction with children, and any restrictions on the disclosure of information about reasonably suspected abuse.

Protecting Our Children—Legislative Reform. Many states have unreasonably short civil and/or criminal statutes of limitations provisions for childhood sexual abuse, as well as weak or nonexistent mandatory reporting requirements. These deficiencies often allow sexual abusers of children to abuse again and preclude access to the justice system by victims/survivors.

Therefore, to remedy these weaknesses, VOTF urges bishops, religious superiors, and other Church officials to work in good faith with child advocacy groups and Church reform groups to seek enactment of:

1. More just and reasonable criminal and civil statutes of limitations regarding sexual abuse of children.
2. Elimination or substantial lengthening of statutes of limitations on prosecution of felony child sexual abuse crimes, as many states have already done.
3. Mandatory reporting laws for suspected child sexual abuse and effective enforcement mechanisms for such laws.

Reaching Out to Survivors and Their Families. To promote healing and provide Christian witness, VOTF urges that Church officials:

1. Minister to victim-survivors and their families.
2. Visit every parish, school, or other Church institution where an offender served, in order to encourage undisclosed victims to come forward, report the crimes to law enforcement, seek help, and begin recovery.
3. Appeal for anyone who experienced, witnessed, or reasonably suspected sexual abuse of a child to contact law enforcement authorities for investigation and possible prosecution.
4. Urge victims to seek counseling support and provide the necessary Church financing for the counseling.
5. Promptly report all suspected child sexual abuse to law enforcement, regardless of whether such reporting is required by state or federal law.

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