



January 14, 2005

Most Reverend Harry J. Flynn  
Archbishop of St. Paul-Minneapolis  
226 Summit Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55102

Dear Archbishop Flynn:

We are writing on behalf of the members of Voice of the Faithful and our national Task Force on the review of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

Voice of the Faithful joins the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' review in a spirit of hope that the review and revision of the Charter will result in a strong instrument for the protection of the innocent and vulnerable and the production of a great good for the whole Church and society at large.

Enclosed you will find a completed Workbook for the Review of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

Voice of the Faithful commends you and the members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse for your thorough examination of the Charter. We wish to commend the Committee for the following proposed revisions:

The addition of the provision that religious authorities be notified at any place where a priest who has been credibly accused of sexual abuse of a minor may take up residence in retirement. Voice of the Faithful believes this provision should be strengthened by making this a public notification and not a confidential one as the committee proposes.

The addition of language in the new Article 10 which says, „The involvement of the whole Church, especially the laity, at the national as well as the diocesan level, is essential to a credible and accountable response to the problem of sexual abuse by clergy." Voice of the Faithful heartily endorses the addition of this proposed language and looks forward to its implementation. (We note that the new Article 10 differs from the original Article 10 because of a re-arranging of responsibilities in Articles 8, 9 and 10.)

The broadening of the definition of sexual abuse.



The addition of a provision that stipulates every possible step must be taken to restore the good name of any cleric who is falsely accuse

The addition of two representatives of the Religious Superiors for Men to the Ad Hoc Committee. Voice of the Faithful proposes that two (2) members of communities of religious women be added to the Committee as consultants. We make this recommendation because of the knowledge that has been obtained since 2002 concerning allegations of abuse against members of religious communities of women and because of the expertise and a differing viewpoint that vowed women religious can bring to the Committee and its work for the benefit of the whole Church and society. We propose also that the bishops add consultation from the survivor community.

Voice of the Faithful also agrees with the Committee,s suggestion of a proposed name change to the Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People.

Voice of the Faithful commends the body of bishops for its announced position of the retention of zero tolerance.

Voice of the Faithful is not in agreement with all proposed changes to the Charter. We wish to draw your attention to areas of grave concern and request reconsideration:

Voice of the Faithful reiterates its strong opposition to self-reporting audits. Voice of the Faithful points to the 52 years surveyed in the John Jay Study as a stunning example of the failure of self reporting of sexual abuse by clergy. We do not believe that self reported audits are credible in the current context. Third party auditing and certification are essential to restoring the public trust.

Voice of the Faithful finds a disturbing softening in the language of the proposed revisions to the Charter. Voice of the Faithful believes the language must not be softened or in any way leave the impression that Charter provisions are recommendations or suggestions. Voice of the Faithful is firm in its position that the Charter language must be strengthened to eliminate guesswork, wiggle room and any confusion regarding a bishop,s responsibilities in protecting children and young people.

Voice of the Faithful believes the eloquent references to Our Lord in the original preamble should be retained.

Voice of the Faithful opposes the use of any language in the Charter articles, preamble or conclusion that seeks to cast the crisis in the past



tense. We believe it is most certainly premature to define the crisis as history. The crisis and all that it has wrought in Catholic life is still very much with us.

Finally, we urge the Committee, and all bishops, to embrace the following commitments:

To seek, welcome and honor the wisdom and lived experience of the survivor community as we work toward resolution of the crisis and restoration of trust in the Church.

To specifically reference the conduct of bishops in addition to priests and deacons. Voice of the Faithful is aware that all bishops are priests but believes the language of the Charter should not exclude bishops or cardinals from the effect of the provisions.

To make public the names of the members of diocesan review board, the process for replacing members and the publication of quarterly reports of the boards' activity in diocesan newspapers and on diocesan websites.

To provide full funding of the Causes and Context study.

To provide full funding for the operation of the Office of Child and Youth Protection and to fill the position of executive director in the immediate future.

We believe the next Charter review should take place in three years rather than in a five year time period, as proposed by the Committee. The implementation of the Charter and the healing of the Church require major commitments and efforts by all parties. We believe it is desirable to formally assess our shared progress in three years.

Voice of the Faithful believes the success of the Charter will come only when it is truly a part of parish life for all Catholics. We propose the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Review Board, Voice of the Faithful and other organizations of lay Catholics cooperate in an extensive education campaign regarding the Charter. Education is the key to compliance with the Charter.

As you know, many of our members are deeply involved in parish life and have experienced the practical challenges of creating safe environments for children and young people. We have created a Charter compliance checklist for use in parishes and would be most willing to provide it for distribution to all parishes.



We would be happy to discuss all or any portion of this letter with you and all of any part of our comments in the Workbook.

We ask for the Holy Spirit,s guidance upon your work.

Sincerely,

Kristine Ward  
Vice President  
Chairperson, Task Force on Charter Review  
Dayton, OH

James E. Post  
President  
Boston, MA

Enclosure