



Put Out Into the *Deep* From Shadow to Light

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

This coming week, the diocesan website (www.dioceseofbrooklyn.org) will carry an extensive report to the laity of the Diocese of Brooklyn entitled, *From Shadow to Light and from Scandal to Healing: The Experience of the Diocese of Brooklyn with the Sex Abuse Scandal*. This report responds to many of the concerns surrounding the issue of sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the clergy and employees of the Catholic Church in the United States and our own Diocese of Brooklyn. Today, however, I would like to answer some of the most asked questions regarding the current debate on this matter.

Question 1: Why does the New York State Catholic Conference oppose the Markey Bill in favor of the Lopez Bill?

The easy answer perhaps is that there must be fairness to all victims and no exclusion of institutions that might have some responsibility for not preventing sexual abuse. The Markey Bill creates two classes of victims; namely, those who claim to have been victimized by clergy and employees of the Catholic Church and other not-for-profit institutions, and those who were victimized by employees of governmental institutions such as the public schools. Victims of employees of public institutions currently cannot commence litigation unless a Notice of Claim is filed with the institution within 90 days of the claimed abuse. The Markey Bill only permits an extension of the statute of limitations for those victims who claim to have been abused by church or not-for-profit institutions, clergy or employees and not those abused by employees of public schools. It provides for a one-year period by which cases may be brought against churches or not-for-profit institutions regardless of when the abuse occurred. There is no such provision in the Markey Bill for victims of public school teachers or other governmental employees. The statute of limitations is a principle of law which goes back centuries and is meant to instill fairness to all in the judicial process. After a certain period of time, memories fade, witnesses are not available and perpetrators die. The Markey Bill claims to protect victims in the future, yet, only addresses past issues. On the other hand, the Lopez Bill extends the period of time for all victims so that they have an additional five years after majority in order to litigate their claim. It is a look forward bill not a look back bill.

Question 2: Does the Church ignore victims and its responsibility toward them?

I must answer clearly that the Church never ignores victims, certainly, since the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People of 2002 was adopted by the Bishops of the U.S., where clear procedures are outlined for offering counseling to victims on an ongoing basis without limitations as long as a professional counselor deems it necessary. This counseling is offered without external verification except on the word of the presenting victim. Also, meetings of reconciliation are offered to all victims. An invitation is extended to victim/sur-

vivors to meet with me. Since I began my tenure as Bishop of Brooklyn, I have personally met with and communicated with over 40 victims, together with Sister Ellen Patricia Finn, O.P., our Victims Assistance Coordinator. We are engaged also in other rehabilitation services when deemed necessary, assisting victims with housing, employment and other immediate needs. Last year, the counseling program alone cost the diocese \$136,354.

Question 3: What has the Church done to prevent a recurrence of the sexual abuse crisis of the past?

First, we must affirm that this is a crisis of the past. Since the early 1980s, the number of cases has dramatically declined. Even reporting of such cases is practically non-existent. Unfortunately, it seems that historical cases stem from the 1960s and '70s. It has been described by some professionals as an epidemic, meaning that it had a beginning and an end. In studies being conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, seeking to find the causes in the context of that so-called epidemic, I myself am a consultant to the research committee because of my background in social research. The full report will not be available for at least another year. However, promising research findings will help to clarify the causes of the crisis. But what is the Church doing to prevent these occurrences in the future? Our victim prevention program is extensive. Sometimes it is misunderstood. All clergy and employees of the diocese who have contact with children are required to take VIRTUS training which informs them about the danger signs that should be detected when a child seems disturbed, perhaps because of sexual abuse. All clergy and employees undergo criminal background checks according to New York State laws. Unfortunately recently, it was reported by the New York State Comptroller that between 2006 and 2007, 30 individuals without criminal background checks were hired by the New York Public Schools including one alleged sex offender. The prevention efforts of our diocese are directed by Sister Pat Hudson, C.S.J. Extensive efforts have been made including the training of children to be aware of potential sexual predators. This program is called the Child Lures Program and is in place in all of our parishes. Last year, the cost of this program was \$315,000.

Question 4: Is it the Church's desire that victims be prevented from having their day in court in order to bring suit against the institution of the Church?

The Church supports the position that victims should have their day in court and access to our judicial process. Its support of the Lopez Bill is a clear indication of this position. The Lopez Bill extends the statute of limitations for a longer period of time than the Markey Bill so that more victims of abuse may bring lawsuits in the future. It also permits individuals who have been victimized by perpetrators employed by public institutions to

bring lawsuits. Under New York State law, to bring a lawsuit against a public school or municipality, you must first file a notice within 90 days of the incident indicating your intention to sue. For cases involving minors, it is 90 days after reaching the age of 18. The Markey Bill does nothing to remove that "notice of claim" obstacle. The Lopez Bill treats all institutions equally – public, non-profit and for-profit – and does not create the two classes of victims whose only difference is where their abuser worked. When a similar law passed in California, those abused in public schools were turned away by the courts. The Church does oppose legislation that permits lawsuits against institutions based upon incidents long in the past, as the presentation of such cases is contrary to our traditional sense of statute of limitations, whereby it has been determined that it is not fair to bring such cases where necessary individuals are deceased and adequate evidence cannot be obtained.

Question 5: What is the likely impact upon the Church if this legislation were to pass?

Some have alleged that the Church has resources to pay the extraordinary settlements that are requested. We cannot forget that the Markey Bill, before the legislature, comes by way of California where each case of abuse was settled for approximately \$2 million, almost as a class action case. The issue of bankruptcy has been brought up. Since it really is not known what the liability is yet, many dioceses, five to be exact, have filed for bankruptcy and reorganization since they cannot pay the extraordinary settlements required. There is little insurance coverage for these historical incidents since many of these insurance companies have already consolidated or gone out of business, and they also have statutes of limitations on where their responsibility ends. The only recourse of the diocese would be to sell properties currently in use. This means parishes and schools, as well, will file for reorganization. It would also mean curtailing services in education and social services.

Question 6: What about the priest perpetrators? Are they not punished for their wrongdoings?

Sexual abuse is a crime and a sin. Our diocese is committed to reporting all allegations of crimes to law enforcement and fully cooperating with investigations into these matters. This is of such grave importance that upon arriving in the diocese I established a toll-free telephone number (1-888-634-4499) to ensure that all allegations be immediately referred to the appropriate district attorney.

We are also a Church. Therefore we must also deal with sin and the ramifications of sin. The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People requires that any priest who has a credible allegation regarding the sexual abuse of a minor be removed from ministry. They may no longer present themselves as priests. Some also have been laicized – separated from the priesthood.

Catholic School Support Services Office Is Reorganized

Will Offer Assistance to Schools for Identity, Marketing, Governance, and Development

As part of the ongoing reconfiguration of the diocese, the Vicar General, Auxiliary Bishop Frank Caggiano, announced the reorganization of the Office of Superintendent of Catholic School Support Services. Bishop Caggiano indicated that "it is essential that the Office of Superintendent provide services to principals and ensure the continuity and lasting endurance of our Catholic Schools." The Office has

been re-structured to include Catholic Identity, Governance, Marketing and Professional Development.

The eight Associate Superintendents will each be assigned to specific schools and areas of competencies. Dr. Thomas Chadzutko, the diocesan Superintendent for School Support Services, who played a key role in the reorganization, remarked that a key goal is to ensure that "the Superintendent's Office is accountable

for following up on initiatives, ensuring schools are implementing their strategic plan and that the resources are in place to support individual school initiatives."

The Office of Superintendent has cultivated relationships with St. John's University and the College of New Rochelle. The institutions of higher learning are working to assist schools by offering professional development for teachers and principals, working

with school boards to develop marketing plans, and grant writing to increase resources available to schools.

"These schools really stepped up," said Chadzutko. "Despite the many financial demands that every institution faces, St. John's University Provost, Dr. Sister Julie Upton, and Dr. Ronald Valenti of the College of New Rochelle were immediately responsive to our requests and generous with assistance."

Campus Ministry at St. John's Welcomes 29 New Catholics

St. John's Office of Campus Ministry culminated a yearlong Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) program as 29 new members of the University community received the sacraments of initiation at the school's St. Thomas More Church.

Auxiliary Bishop Ignatius A. Catanello, administered Baptism, Confirmation and First Communion.

"On this special day we ask God to open our minds and our hearts and welcome these new members in calling each and every one of us to do what he wants us to do and be who he wants us to be," said Bishop Catanello. "In doing so, he gives us a very special gift today—the gift of himself."

"It was definitely a moving experience and it was really

nice to have the amount of time we had to prepare because it really does get you ready. And when the ceremony begins and it happens—it's indescribable," said St. John's freshman Joel Graff, one of the members of the RCIA.

Graff's girlfriend Tess who is Catholic and urged him to join the program agreed wholeheartedly.

"When the music started I almost began to cry because I was so excited for him. It makes me happy to be Catholic and have him with me."

The candidates have been preparing to take their sacraments since September, 2008.

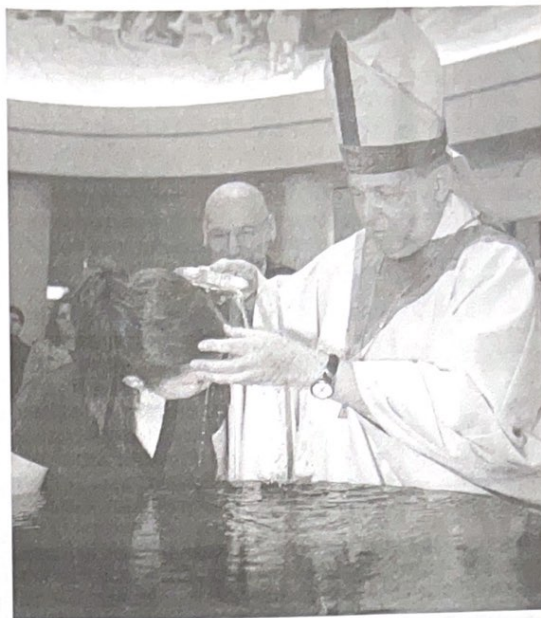
Stephen M. DeBlasio, director of faith formation and liturgy, and Father John Kettelberger, C.M., have served as mentors and stewards of the

program along with Pamela Shea-Byrnes, vice president for University Ministry, who oversees all aspects of the program.

"You have been a great example to us," said Father Kettelberger, to the new members in concluding the ceremony in front of a large throng of family, friends and well-wishers.

"We thank you for allowing us to celebrate with you on this wonderful day in your lives."

Key events during the RCIA process have included the Rite of Acceptance ceremony in November 2008 when the candidates confirm their faith and the Rite of Election when they make a final commitment to the program by signing the Book of the Elect in late February 2009. New members to the



▲ Auxiliary Bishop Ignatius Catanello baptizes a participant in the RCIA program at St. John's University.

faith go through the Catholic rites, traditions and rituals that have withstood the test of time for centuries.

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In many cases, the priests have been sent for treatment. In some instances before 2002, these priests were cleared by competent mental health professionals to return for reassignment. We have conducted a thorough review in our diocese and I am not aware of any case in which those priests that were returned to ministry following treatment were accused of inappropriate behavior or abuse. Nevertheless, as we strive to remain ever vigilant in the protection of the young, these priests no longer can publicly function as a priest and have all been removed from ministry.

As you will see in the larger report, care for perpetrators must include moral and psychological

counseling and an invitation to live a life of prayer and penance which is organized for them by Father Ray Roden, our priest delegate to priests on administrative leave.

Question 7: Does not the Church have a moral responsibility to assist victims?

I have always maintained that the Church has a moral responsibility to assist victims which comes from our nature as a Church, but that the legal responsibility for past cases which are beyond the statute of limitations cannot be attributed to our responsibility. This does not mean that we will not assist victims whose statute of limitations has ended. We are making every effort to reach out to these individuals with spiritual,

moral, and economic assistance when this is requested. There are many times when the victims' lawyers will not let them avail themselves of any counseling by the Church or meetings for purposes of reconciliation.

It is truly a complex matter with which we are dealing. I invite you to read the comprehensive report which answers these questions and others in more depth. As the title of the report mentions, we must move From Shadow to Light into healing and reconciliation. It is an effort in putting out into the deep. Please pray that the Church, which includes you and I, has not abandoned those who may have, in any way, been hurt by the Church, but rather be assisted to become survivors of sexual abuse and not remain victims.