

THOMAS P. DOYLE, J.C.D., C.A.D.C.

9700 WOODLAND GLEN COURT, VIENNA, VIRGINIA 22182

May 14, 2008

Ms. Theresa Kettelkamp
USCCB
3211 4th St., NE
Washington, DC, 20017

Dear Ms Kettelkamp,

I have never met nor communicated with you since you assumed your present position. I had the pleasure of having several conversations with your predecessor before she moved on. I had a great deal of respect for her and for what she attempted to accomplish.

I am prompted to write today because I read your article in the Tidings. I do not intend to be critical of you personally. I wish to share some thoughts from my own perspective on the clergy sex abuse issue which reaches back to 1984. I have had extensive and intense involvement with victims throughout the years. This contact has been with victims from the age of 10 to 92 in just about every diocese in this country and includes involvement in several foreign countries as well.

The pope's remarks and his meeting with victims were a significant step forward yet they come far too late to restore the trust that the hierarchy, from the Vatican on down, has squandered due to its response to this nightmare. In your article you list the accomplishments of the US bishops since 2002. This is impressive. It does not tell the complete story. The pope gets "it." But what does he get? He knows this is a terrible problem and he knows it has cost the US Church a massive amount of money. Since his main sources of information are the bishops I believe it is safe to say that what the pope gets, is their version of "it." The very fact that the pope praised the bishops for their response, in spite of his admission that the problem was not always handled correctly shows that there is a massive part of "it" that he does not get.

The prevention programs, policies, boards and well-crafted public statements have done little for the thousands of victims who are still living with the trauma, anger and pain. None of the bishops' collective efforts and very, very few of the efforts of individual bishops give evidence of an understanding of the true pastoral needs of the victims and their families. Paid counseling, a couple of meetings with a diocesan outreach person or a meeting with a bishop does not amount to pastoral care. Some of the bishops may think so but in my experience with victims, none of these efforts convince victims that the institutional Church either understands or really cares.

I have spoken with countless victims over the years. One of the most devastating effects of the sexual abuse itself as well as the negative response of the institutional Church has been the spiritual damage done. Catholics often equate spirituality with ritual, liturgy and the sacraments. My experience with the victims has convinced me that there is much, much more to it and that attendance at liturgies or reception of sacraments does not suffice to fill a spiritual void. At no time has the institutional Church ever attempted to delve into this dimension of the damage done from sexual abuse. The beginning of healing is not a return to the institution or its rituals but the re-construction of a self-concept that tells the victim that he or she has indeed *not* been rejected by a Higher Power.

The pope's words and gestures, re-assuring and encouraging though they may be to many, are a distraction from the persistent attitude of many of the U.S. bishops. In spite of what the pope said, far too many have *not* done everything possible to heal the wounds. In fact, their persistent actions serve to keep the wounds open and the pain fresh.

The expensive public relations firms employed by bishops will never be able to conjure up stories that will convince the victims, their loved ones, their supporters and countless others that the bishops have done everything possible to right the wrongs. Victims are still subjected to humiliating resistance in the civil courts. It's easy enough to say that the vicious court battles are fought by attorneys who would end them if the victims simply dropped their cases. Make no mistake. These men and women whose lives have been ruined are not in court because they want to be. It is a last resort. I have been involved in more court battles than I care to remember. I have encountered attorneys who represented Church interests whose tactics were brutal and re-victimizing and who excused their actions with the claim that "this is the way it works." The bishops know this. They condone it and in so doing their words of apology and understanding become empty.

There have been attempts to get legislative change in several States. The goals are legislation that will be more favorable to victims and significantly unfavorable to perpetrators and those who enable perpetrators. It is widely acknowledged that Catholic clergy abuse victims constitute less than 10% of the victims of child sexual abuse. Yet in every State the most vehement opposition to any change has been the State Catholic Conference. The bishops have used erroneous information, twisted information, strong-arm tactics, character assassination and threats to persuade lawmakers. I could cite pages of documented examples in each of the States wherein change has been proposed but I would single out the States of Colorado, Ohio and Maryland as glaring examples of Church leadership that expended millions, stooped at little and placed their own interests ahead of those of the community or the victims. How can one find credibility in the pope's words in light of what we have experienced from so many bishops over the past few years? If the bishops indeed are "getting it" they need to know that bureaucratic and administrative measures are hardly a substitute for true concern for the victims or for what caused them to *become* victims.

I realize that there is little you can do to change the culture of the hierarchy. The impressive list of changes made by US bishops since 2002 tell only the story of administrative

and bureaucratic efforts. No matter how well-intended these efforts have been the fact remains that they were forced on the bishops by the public outrage, civil court actions and media scrutiny that welled up following the Boston revelations.

The credibility of the bishops is of minor consequence compared to the welfare of the countless victims who are known, the even more who remain silent and the unknown boys and girls who could still be abused because significant efforts to identify and control them are thwarted by those who oppose any legislative advancement or those who still prefer favorable treatment of complicit institutions over the safety of children.

There is much to “it” that the pope and the bishops still don’t get. The institutional Catholic Church places a disproportionate value on words and ceremonies. Neither will accomplish the needed changes to protect children and care for known victims. What must happen includes:

1. Cessation of all defensive legal tactics in pending cases
2. An end to all public relations efforts that try to place blame for the financial problems of dioceses on victims and their attorneys
3. Public identification of all known sexual abusers among the clergy
4. Absolutely no return to ministry of any cleric credibly accused of any form of sexual abuse or acting out
5. Recognition of and action regarding the sexual abuse of age-appropriate men and women by clerics
6. Forced resignation of any bishop who has knowingly sheltered sexual abusers or who has obstructed justice in any way
7. Canonical prosecution by the Holy See of any bishop accused of sexual abuse and *not* comfortable retirement accompanied by silence
8. Complete support by bishops for legislative changes proposed by child advocates in any State where such change is proposed
9. Publication by every diocese of the *true* dollar amounts paid to all attorneys retained to defend them in civil suits, e.g., how much did Los Angeles really spend in its battles to prevent disclosure of files
10. Full disclosure of all records and files without court battles or expensive and time consuming legal tactics
11. Cessation of all tactics by bishops to discredit victims’ support groups or individual supporters of victims including an end to banning such groups or

individuals from speaking or otherwise communicating in dioceses or parishes.

12. Public acknowledgment by the USCCB of the divisive tactics employed by bishops especially in the area of blocking legislative reforms, and an apology to those who have been slandered or otherwise hurt by such tactics.

In my opinion the most pressing need is

1. for an honest recognition that the bishops have made a series of damaging mistakes (*"I am truly sorry for what I have done to cause this problem as opposed to "We apologize if mistakes were made."*);
2. For an attempt to understand the pastoral and spiritual damage done to victims and the discovery of ways to offer healing;
3. For a recognition that the sexual abuse nightmare has its roots in the clerical culture and in the Church traditional sexual philosophy and a call for a serious study of each in spite of Vatican opposition
4. for an obvious shift in priorities from doctrinal orthodoxy and obedience to the Vatican in all things to an active, constant concern for the marginalized, the hurting, the rejected and the discouraged in the spirit of the Gospel.... *"If you do this to the least of my brothers you do it to me."*

On a personal note, I appreciate and applaud all you have done and continue to do for victims. Their welfare is far more important than the bishops' image or reputation. The Church will move toward where it needs to be when the center of concern is no longer the hierarchy but the many whose lives have been damaged by the institutional Church and its clergy.

Sincerely,

Thomas P. Doyle, J.C.D., C.A.D.C.