

April 19, 2002

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

These last few months, our Catholic Church has been living through unprecedented media coverage about clergy sexual misconduct, particularly with minors. It is a topic that will be discussed this coming week in Rome, when I join with other cardinal archbishops from around the country for meetings with the Holy Father and Vatican officials. As I prepare for those meetings, I briefly wanted to share with you what has happened — and what will happen — as it relates to this issue here in the Archdiocese of Detroit.

In November 1988, Cardinal Szoka promulgated policies and procedures for sexual misconduct of clergy and Church personnel, particularly with regard to abuse of minors; they have served us well. In light of what we have learned from our own experience, we have revised them twice. Now, we are in the process of revising them again to ensure even greater objectivity as we seek to provide better care for victims, as well as priests who have been accused. During this time, the archdiocese has never prohibited or discouraged complainants from taking their concerns directly to civil authorities. Regardless, from this point forward, we are committed to report all accusations to the appropriate law enforcement agencies.

Over the last fourteen years, our decisions have been guided by a sexual abuse committee composed of professional people with competence in psychology, canon law, and civil law; to strengthen its integrity and independence, we will expand and make public its membership. I regret that our efforts to respect the confidentiality of the victim and the accused may have been perceived as secrecy. To clear up any confusion or suspicion as to how we have handled such cases, these past files will now be shared with civil authorities.

Our primary prime concern is for the victims and their families. Our intent is to improve our response, making it more pastoral and ongoing. We realize, too, that clergy sexual misconduct also brings suffering to parishioners; therefore, we are developing protocols for parishes grieving with the loss of their priest. In the next month or so, I intend to bring together our priests to promote greater accountability and mutual support for their valuable service to the archdiocese. In addition, our seminary will be strengthening its processes for screening candidates for the priesthood and preparing future priests for the challenges of ordained ministry.

These past few weeks, I have been most grateful for the input and opinions I've received from many of you. I thank you for your support — for me and for my brother priests — during these difficult days. I hope and pray you can always continue to say, “I'm proud to be a Catholic.” Please be assured that I will continue to communicate with you all aspects of our new policy and procedures.

In closing, I ask forgiveness from anyone who was ever abused by one of our priests. I acknowledge the mistakes made by Church leaders — here and elsewhere — in managing this situation. The Lord promised to be with us and He has been true to His Word. Our Church has survived and grown stronger through many different challenges in past centuries, and so, we have no reason for fear or alarm. Let us trust in His abiding presence and love even as we work together to create a stronger and healthier Church for this new millennium.

With prayerful best wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

Adam Cardinal Maida
Archbishop of Detroit