



Statement of Cardinal Law
April 21, 2002

As I prepare to leave for a meeting in Rome with other Cardinals from the United States, the leadership of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and officials of the Holy See on the subject of the sexual abuse of minors by clergy, I would like to share with you the message I will be carrying to the Holy Father and to other participants.

Some have likened the situation facing the Catholic Church in Boston and across the country to last year's September 11th tragedy, a crisis which shocks the heart and soul and which must spark immediate and decisive changes in order to prevent possible recurrence in the future. Regrettably, I and many others have been late to recognize the inadequacy of past policies, the dimensions of the crisis and the changes required to restore a sense of trust. The repeated public calls for my resignation are a clear signal that many feel my leadership efforts in this area have been inadequate.

I wish that I could turn the clock back and undo the hurt and harm that have been caused to children, families and others as a result of some actions and decisions made both before my arrival in 1984 and during my tenure as Archbishop. While I cannot undo the past, and many feel I cannot effectively fix the problems for the future, please know that I am committed to bring before the Holy Father, officials of the Holy See and Bishops of other dioceses in our nation and throughout the world, our experience in Boston - both our significant mistakes as well as our successful efforts.

In presenting the experience of the Archdiocese, these are among the points I plan to make:

- **Seriousness of this Issue:** The crisis of clergy sexual abuse of minors is not just a media-driven or public perception concern in the United States, but is a very serious issue undermining the mission of the Catholic Church.
- **Protection of children:** The protection of children must be the number one priority. When credible claims of abuse are made, priests must be removed from active ministry.
- **Support for persons abused:** A variety of support services must be provided to help those individuals and families that have been victimized.
- **Support for active priests:** The overwhelming majority of priests who continue to serve the Church and minister with dedication and integrity must be supported not only during this crisis, but also on a continuing basis in new and significant ways.
- **Education:** A comprehensive educational program must be developed around this issue for children, parents, teachers at all levels, clergy, pastoral staffs and all Church workers.
- **Need for greater openness:** The laity should have a stronger voice in the life of the Church. With specific regard to the handling of sexual abuse cases, significant presence of lay persons on boards that review all such cases should be encouraged, as has been the case in the Archdiocese of Boston since 1993, when a board comprised almost totally of lay persons was established. Thought must also be given as to how the roles of such bodies as Archdiocesan or Diocesan Pastoral Councils can be enhanced.
- **Pastoral Support:** Appropriate pastoral support must also be provided for priests against whom credible allegations have been made. Thought must be given as to what this care should be and how it can best be provided. More adequate procedures must also be considered to effect laicization when it is appropriate.
- **Pastoral nature of the Church's response:** The Church's primary response to victims in addressing claims of such abuse should be a pastoral one. We must be a Church of healing and reconciliation.
- **Review of data:** We should enlist the assistance of experts to study the data on cases of living priests against whom credible allegations of abuse have been made, in the hope that such study might yield helpful information about this pathology in general and, specifically, concerning this pathology as it relates to clergy.

Although I have highlighted just a few areas in this statement, be sure that I will also attempt to reflect what I have heard in various listening sessions and pastoral encounters.

Despite the anger and broken trust that many feel toward me, and despite the perceptions that next week is simply a gathering of aged, conservative cardinals and Vatican officials, please know that as long as I am in a position to do



so, I will work tirelessly to address this crisis and to underscore its severity. This is a wake-up call for the Church. The unprecedented meeting next week is a clear signal that the Holy See and Church leadership in the United States recognize the gravity of the current situation. These discussions will set the groundwork for additional action in the future.

However challenging these days are for all of us, I firmly believe that God has given us an opportunity to make positive and significant changes for the future. In this Archdiocese, for example, we have already implemented policies that clearly put the protection of children first, and which ensure that no assignment be given a priest against whom a credible allegation of such abuse has been made. Furthermore, we have provided to the appropriate public authorities the names of all such priests known to us. Please keep this upcoming meeting in your prayers. While I do not expect it to result in a detailed program, for that would be premature, it will be of great significance for the June, 2002 meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and for further efforts to work with the Holy See to address this issue.

As always when I am away, I carry you, my brothers and sisters of the Archdiocese of Boston, in my thoughts and prayers. Please pray for me even as I continue to pray for you.

Bernard Cardinal Law
Archbishop of Boston
April 21, 2002

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