

Voice of the Faithful National Statement

US Conference of Catholic Bishops President Must Investigate Child Sexual Abuse in Philadelphia & Dioceses Nationwide

NEWTON, Mass., March 15, 2011 – The clergy child sexual abuse scandal in Philadelphia and, by implication nationwide, must be investigated by Archbishop Timothy Dolan, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops president, according to the worldwide church reform group Voice of the Faithful. Bishops are not following the conference's guidelines for handling child sexual abuse cases and at least one church official is charged with covering up abuse.

Voice of the Faithful has watched the Philadelphia scandal worsen in the three weeks since a grand jury reported 37 priests credibly accused of child sexual abuse were still in active ministry. Two priests, an ex-priest and a Catholic school teacher are charged with child rape, and Msgr. William Lynn, former head of the archdiocese's Office of Clergy is charged with endangering children by transferring credibly accused priests from parish to parish. The grand jury reported Archbishop of Philadelphia Cardinal Justin Rigali's own review board had ignored convincing evidence of abuse or misconduct, and the review board is reported to have urged church leaders to suspend accused priests during investigations.

The archdiocese ignored the USCCB's Dallas Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People by not removing credibly accused priests, by not reporting abuse to civil authorities and by transferring priests to parishes where their abuses were unknown. This and the secrecy surrounding such actions prevented the USCCB's National Review Board and Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection from adequately auditing the archdiocese's activities and protecting children in Philadelphia.

The scandal in Philadelphia indicates similar issues exist in dioceses nationwide and prompts Voice of the Faithful to ask these questions:

- Why did Cardinal Rigali wait until a grand jury report before removing three priests from ministry?
- Why did Cardinal Rigali withhold 14 abusive cases from his archdiocesan review board?
- How will the USCCB hold Cardinal Rigali accountable for his blatant violation of the Dallas Charter's zero-tolerance policy for child sexual abuse?
- What explanation can Cardinal Rigali offer to the people of Philadelphia for multiple decisions to ignore the zero-tolerance policy and undermine his own archdiocesan review board?

Cardinal Rigali's decisions clearly put the children of Philadelphia at risk, with the implication that children in other dioceses across the country are similarly at risk.

Voice of the Faithful sees only one sure way to prevent such silent complicity in crimes against children in the future: lay involvement in parish and diocesan governance independent of bishops' control. This would include independent lay involvement in parish and diocesan clergy sexual abuse review boards, and independently verified USCCB National Review Board audits to monitor compliance with the Dallas Charter. The diocesan self-verified information on which the board must now rely is insufficient.

“Every survivor of sexual abuse by a Catholic priest, every relative of every survivor, every Catholic in a church pew who expects the Church to protect them and their children from such evil must be near despair at the present condition of their Church,” said Dan Bartley, VOTF president. “Last week on Ash Wednesday, when the names of 21 priests suspended by the Philadelphia archdiocese were released, the shock and pain on parishioners' faces was palpable.”

Voice of the Faithful

Voice of the Faithful is a worldwide movement of concerned mainstream Roman Catholics working to support survivors of clergy sexual abuse, support priests of integrity and shape structural change within the Church. More information is at <http://www.votf.org>.

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