

A LETTER TO OUR PARTNERS AND FRIENDS

Dear Friends,

The sexual abuse scandal in the Church which began two years ago in Boston came to our doorstep this past month. Two of our priests were accused in August and a third was removed from ministry in October, after an allegation against him was presented to the Province's Review Board and deemed credible by the Provincial.

It's important that you, our partners, friends, and family, know that the Chicago Province is committed, as a policy of paramount importance, to prevent occurrences of misconduct by any of its members. The Society of Jesus is committed to treating all human beings with the dignity they deserve, a commitment that demands we do everything in our power to prevent misconduct. In cases where abuse is said to have taken place, this commitment demands we care for the accuser with any means possible and appropriate. At the same time, it demands that we also care for the accused while continuing to respect his dignity. On the opposite page, you can find a statement the Province released in September which may give you greater insight into what we're doing with respect to these allegations and the larger crisis afflicting the church.

During these trying times, it's important for us to pause for a moment and ask what this means for all of us. This is a painful situation. As a therapist who has worked at different times both with victims of sexual abuse and perpetrators of sexual abuse, I can tell you the pain and suffering is unimaginable. To become a victim of one we have learned to trust, one who has power and authority, can truly scar a person for life. And, in spite of popular belief to the contrary, these wounds can remain covered for years. Uncovering them for others to see is painful and requires courage. There is pain for the perpetrators, too. The realization that one has caused another great pain and suffering can be unbearable, even life-shattering.

And for those among us who haven't been abused and haven't been abusers, there is also pain, and often anger directed at the perpetrators, or at the victims for coming forward, at the Church itself, or at the media, or simply because our Church seems to be under attack.

But what do we do with this pain and anger? Some wish it would go away. Some wish we could return to the comfort of the Church in the '50s, post World War II, and pre Vatican II. We can't escape that easily. The pain and anger is real. But it's not without value. The pain we feel reminds us of our humanity, our vulnerability, our need for affection, for love—and it reminds us too of our ability to hurt one another along the way. It also reminds us of our collective responsibility to seek justice. Our anger, our emotions, and our inability to control the current situation serve as poignant reminders that we are not God.

As spiritual directors we learn to ask of our life events: "Where is God in all of this?" and "What is the grace in this moment?" Could it be that God is chal-



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lenging us through this situation to forgive? We pray in the Our Father “forgive us our trespasses *as* we forgive those who trespass against us.” Forgive us *as* we forgive. If we’re angry, how can we forgive the perpetrators, the lawyers, the journalists, the bishops, and others who have brought so much pain?

How can we forgive?

Can we forgive?

God is surely present in this challenge.

You’ve been a partner in mission with the Jesuits, a partner in building, and a partner in witness to God’s grace in all our lives. Now we are partners in pain. Together we must deal with it. I can assure you we’re doing our part to prevent misconduct and to care for those who’ve been affected by it. So please don’t go away like those who “walked with him no more” (John 6:66). Please continue to be our partners, and we will continue to be yours.



Editor’s note: Partners always welcomes your comments and reactions. Please send them to partners@chicagoprovincejesuits.org or 2059 N. Sedgwick St. Chicago, IL 60614.

*Forgive us
our trespasses
as we forgive
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S T A T E M E N T



The Chicago Province is committed, as a policy of paramount importance, to make every possible effort to prevent the occurrence of misconduct by any of its members. Attentive to the dignity that all human beings deserve, we receive all complaints of abuse openly and compassionately. Public response to or public discussion of these situations becomes difficult, if not impossible, once legal proceedings are initiated and litigation is underway.

Specifically, with respect to any allegations of abuse of minors, the province takes the following action:

- ❖ investigates the complaint promptly and effectively with an initial inquiry
- ❖ assists the alleged victim and accused with appropriate pastoral and professional care
- ❖ reports the matter to proper civil and church authorities as required
- ❖ seeks recommendations from a Review Board consisting of five men and three women (who include a religious Sister and two priests)
- ❖ removes a man from active ministry if the complaint is credible
- ❖ proceeds according to the Essential Norms established by the Bishops at Dallas
- ❖ prays throughout for the healing and reconciliation of all parties involved

September 24, 2003