

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

Jimmy M. Lago
Chancellor



Post Office Box 1979
Chicago, Illinois 60690-1979

312 751-5382
Fax: 312 751-5381

To: Reverend Clergy
Catholic School Leadership
Colleagues in Ministry
Administrative Staff
Fellow Employees

From: Jimmy M. Lago

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Re: Actions to Improve Response to Child Abuse Allegations within the Archdiocese

I accept the challenge that Cardinal George has given me: to make sure that, to the extent possible, children in the Archdiocese who are in our care are safe, loved, respected and challenged to be the best that they can be. I firmly believe that this has been the case for over a million children throughout our vibrant history. Our schools, charities, ministry outreach programs and chaplaincies, Catholic hospitals, and especially parishes have been the vehicles for worship, prayer, social concerns, systemic change and especially conversions of heart and mind. Children and families have been well cared for and have in turn caused this local church to flourish. Indeed, it would be fair to state that many people from a broad range of faith traditions also have benefited from the many programs and initiatives of this Archdiocese.

Unfortunately for a few that is not all that has happened. The recent chronicle of this Archdiocese and others has shown that, for a small number of children, innocence has been destroyed, trust betrayed and future lives tragically left to cycles of destructive and addictive behaviors. The long-term negative effects of sexual abuse of minors, especially by clergy, cannot be underestimated.

The Archdiocese also has a well-documented history of good policy, responsible practice and leadership in many areas when it recognized in the 1980's that policy and practice needed to change. This leadership continued through 2002-2003, when the spotlight of national attention was focused on the problem and the practice of dioceses throughout the country to address the issue of sexual misconduct with minors. Cardinal George was among the leaders in the design, promulgation and subsequent approval by the Holy See of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth* and the corresponding canonical document of *Norms*. There is no doubt that his ongoing leadership at the national level and in the broader Church has been a primary reason for continued support of the "zero tolerance" rule among church leaders .

The Archdiocese of Chicago has responded to allegations and accusations since the Dallas 2002 meeting in strict accord with the *Charter* and *Norms*. The protocol is clear: receive the allegation, report to DCFS and other public authorities, engage the victim/survivor in outreach, obtain the facts as they are known by accuser and accused, present the case to the Independent Review Board, forward its recommendation to the Archbishop, receive the Archbishop's decision, prepare the canonical materials for permanent removal of the cleric if the decision is "reasonable cause to suspect child abuse", and make sure that the cleric is in a restricted, monitored setting.

The case of Fr. Dan McCormack raises questions about whether or not the aforementioned protocols were precisely followed. Concerns have been raised over whether the atypical nature of the criminal process and related information in that case require another review of our practice, and whether further amendments are required. I believe that it will be particularly important to clarify what specifications are called for by the Archdiocese when an allegation is made directly to public authorities, as the actions of the public authorities involve a criminal investigation and the Archdiocese is either left uninformed, given minimal information and/or asked to stand aside completely.

With this new mandate from the Cardinal, I am acting as follows:

1. Regarding the Fr. McCormack case, I have initiated an independent review of the actions of all concerned. We have identified an independent firm, Defenbaugh and Associates, Inc., that has conducted numerous audits in other dioceses and has particular expertise in investigative and forensic management analyses. This firm will review the decisions and actions of the Archdiocese and others relating to the Fr. McCormack case. The firm will also review the decisions to first allow Fr. Joseph Bennett to remain in parish ministry and subsequently to remove him temporarily during the ongoing investigation by the Archdiocese. The independent firm will have unrestricted access to all the individuals involved. Their resume is attached. We have been promised cooperation by public authorities. I have asked that the review be completed promptly so that the results can be shared with the public in a timely manner.
2. I have asked a former federal officer, Mr. Terry Childers, who drafted national supervision guidelines for the federal court to conduct a thorough review of the Archdiocese of Chicago's monitoring policies and practices. This review will include the current protocols and practices for individuals already removed from ministry. As part of the review, Mr. Childers is also to make recommendations for monitoring protocols during the period in which an allegation is being investigated, and before a judgment is made regarding the status of the allegation. His resume is attached. This review is expected to last several weeks and will include consultation with local public authorities. Mr. Childers will also make recommendations regarding the current monitoring practices.

3. The Professional Responsibility Administrator reports cases required by the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act. After consultation with the Archbishop and the Professional Responsibility Administrator, I have directed the PRA to broaden the scope of the reporting to include all allegations of child abuse even when the victim is no longer a minor. All of this information is currently shared with the States Attorneys of Cook and Lake Counties. Additionally, we will make sure that our policy manuals, training materials and other practice guides make clear that required reporters have the responsibility to report first to the DCFS.
4. Changes to the Archdiocese's policies are being recommended which clarify the bases for interim action, by the Archbishop after a recommendation by the Professional Responsibility Administrator. A safety plan, which is typically designed by the DCFS, may include the immediate and/or temporary removal from ministry during this phase.

As a former child abuse investigator and child protective services administrator, I believe strongly in the policies and practice of the AOC. These latest actions confirm our intent to ensure that they are followed and that atypical situations are always decided in favor of the safety of children. The goal of these initiatives is to ensure the protection of children, while at the same time dealing fairly with those who have been accused. I pledge my complete commitment to this effort.