



COUNCIL of RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF METROPOLITAN CHICAGO

April 19, 2002

STATEMENT ON SEXUAL ABUSE BY CLERGY

Members of the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago have gathered today in awareness of the widely publicized tragedy of clergy sexual abuse. The Council is composed of leaders of the Chicago area's Episcopalian, Roman Catholic, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish, and Islamic communions and institutions.

We are religious leaders of many backgrounds and traditions, but we are united in our remorse that such violations of sacred trust and conduct should ever have occurred. Most egregious are those instances in which children and youth have been violated and abused. There are no excuses for such behavior and no sufficient apology to the victims of these transgressions.

Many of the events now being made public go back over an extended number of years. During that period of time, significant changes have taken place within religious organizations and in society at-large in coming better to understand the nature and extent of sexual abuse, and the widespread abuse of children in particular.

Societal and professional understandings and expectations have continued to evolve. Judgments made in earlier decisions may now be recognized as sadly deficient. In some instances justice still waits to be achieved. Regrettably, in some it may never be.

There is widespread recognition that credible accusations were, in the past, too frequently denied

in our faith communities. We, as religious leaders, affirm that claims of abuse need to be taken seriously and investigated with careful scrutiny. It is now clear that far more stringent ways must be employed to protect our communities, particularly children and youth, from becoming victims of past abusers.

Chicago's religious leaders have for many years been engaged in defining and enforcing stringent policies regarding sexual abuse. Within their separate structures and disciplines, they have redoubled efforts to adopt policies and practices that may best redress past failures and protect their people from future offense. They will continue to do so and, wherever possible, work in close consultation and cooperation with civil authorities.

Members of the Council have gathered today to assist and reinforce one another in these efforts. We have shared present and emerging policies of our various communities. Specific questions and details regarding these matters should be addressed to the offices of our member religious bodies.

There is still much work to be done in addressing the complexities of this issue. We are pledged to pursue all those ways in which the wounded, both abused and abuser, may be healed, the innocent protected, and the trust of all restored.

Bishop William Persell, President
Rev. Paul H. Rutgers, Executive Director

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