



ARCHDIOCESES OF LOS ANGELES AND SAN FRANCISCO  
DIOCESES OF FRESNO, MONTEREY, OAKLAND, ORANGE, SACRAMENTO, SAN BERNARDINO, SAN DIEGO, SAN JOSE, SANTA ROSA AND STOCKTON  
BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF VAN NUYS, MARONITE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF OUR LADY OF LEBANON OF LOS ANGELES

December 8, 2002

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We write to advise you of a major development related to the issue of sexual abuse, a matter which has so deeply affected us all during this past year. Last June, the California Legislature took the unprecedented step of changing the statute of limitations applicable to claims for sexual abuse. For the duration of year 2003, this law allows people to file lawsuits against dioceses and California employers based upon claims that arose many decades ago. Some of the lawsuits may involve the revival of already settled cases and some may involve alleged perpetrators and witnesses long since dead. Under those circumstances, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain the truth. The ability to conduct a fair and vigorous search for the truth has been part of the very foundation of our American system of justice for more than two centuries.

We anticipate that new lawsuits, some involving very old allegations, will be filed against dioceses in California. We bishops stand ready to respond to legitimate claims by victims of abuse.

The Catholic Church has been falsely portrayed as a large corporation with “deep pockets.” In reality, the vast majority of Catholic assets belong to the people of our parishes, schools, charities, and other institutions. They are not devoted to the accumulation of wealth but to education, worship, and sacraments: to the poor and other works of charity. With God’s help, the church must continue to respond to the needs of the victims of abuse, and maintain the vital spiritual, educational and social services provided to the Catholic community and to our society at large.

During the past year, the Bishops in the United States enacted a national *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* and related “Norms” that will have the force of Church law. These decisions strengthen and add to policies that have been in place in the dioceses in California for many years. They include the following provisions:

- ◆ To assist and support victims of sexual abuse;
- ◆ To work with parishes to maintain and provide a safe environment for children and young people;
- ◆ To report allegations of sexual abuse against minors and to cooperate with civil authorities;
- ◆ To engage lay-majority review boards to assist in implementing our sexual abuse policies;
- ◆ To remove sexual abusers permanently from ministry.

In this difficult time we reiterate our commitment to a safe environment for children and youth in the Catholic Church. We offer again our apologies to the victims of sexual abuse by clergy and we promise our prayers and ongoing support. We commit ourselves to keep you, the faithful, fully informed on these matters.