

12 July 2004

Dear Father / Parish Director / Deacon / Central Office Staff:

One of the purposes for initially establishing the archdiocesan electronic system almost five years ago was to provide a vehicle for timely communication to the clergy and lay leaders of the Archdiocese. On occasion, that includes clarification or correction of materials appearing in the local media.

In last Tuesday's edition of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (July 6, 2004) an editorial criticized me by name, and judged my efforts to protect children in a specific case some fifteen years ago woefully inadequate, and indeed another example of the Church's poor response to the serious problem of sexual abuse of minors. Granted, much was done poorly at times both within the Church and within the larger community, but I confess that I was upset over that commentary, and decided that you, as well as the people you serve, deserve a fuller explanation of the matter.

The complete narrative of this situation extended over several years prior to any attempt by anyone to contact me. I was then approached with some generic concerns and I immediately conveyed them to the religious order superior.

There are several very significant aspects of my involvement in this case that were either unknown, or worse, ignored by the editorial writers and others reporting on this story.

First, because the concerns brought to me raised questions regarding the welfare of children, I immediately brought the matter to the attention of the proper superiors of that religious order. Keep in mind that religious communities are separate from a diocese and that a diocesan bishop is forbidden by Church law to interfere in the internal life of a religious community except in very specific cases.

Second because I am not trained in such matters, in my written response to the individual who first wrote about these concerns, I specifically encouraged that individual to contact civil authorities directly if they had further information so that professionals experienced in investigation could do so.

Third, the religious order priest in question had been restricted by the courts from all contact with minors. However, another court order, requested by the family, allowed for such contact with his nephew. That court action had unforeseen, but seriously harmful consequences.

Fourth, in reviewing my letter of response some fifteen years ago, I believed that it accomplished two things. First, it was a prompt response, assuring that the report was taken seriously and had been referred to the religious order superior for follow up. Second, it encouraged reporting to the civil authorities.

Finally, I have no recollection of ever hearing the name of the priest just charged and brought back to Milwaukee for trial, until reading it in the newspaper like everyone else. Because he was a student, living at a religious order house and not functioning in any ministerial or archdiocesan capacity, he would not have required faculties to be present in the archdiocese.

Many mistakes have been made in these matters by the Church and the larger society over the years. Still, I believe that the information noted above is important enough to share with you for a fuller understanding of the circumstances than were mentioned in media accounts. Nevertheless, no amount of apology on anyone's part can undo the past, and we must remain committed to do everything in our power to make sure such abuse is eliminated from our Church, our society and our world.

Please join me in fervent prayer for the healing of all victims and their families affected by the scourge of abuse.

Bishop Richard J. Sklba