

BISHOP JOHN B. McCORMACK
REMARKS REGARDING AGREEMENT WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL
DECEMBER 10, 2002

Today the people of New Hampshire should be able to see some light penetrating the seemingly endless darkness that has enveloped our Church in New Hampshire during this past year.

With the conclusion of the Attorney General's investigation of the Diocese, we have a better ability to move forward in humility and with faith. Horrific acts of sexual abuse by some priests have resulted in terrible harm to children and youth. I know that the pain of their abuse may remain with them for years, and that is why we are doing and will do all we can to bring the healing balm of Christ to their pain. As Our Lord's suffering was the instrument of our salvation and the foundation of our Church, we take these steps to assure victims that their suffering will be the instrument of significant change and the foundation of a new Church policy that protects all children and youth in its care. We are now committed to concentrate our energy and resources on preventing such horrible behavior from ever affecting our children again. May our efforts assure them that the anguish and hurt they have suffered will not have been in vain. To any victim, I say that it is not your fault that this happened and that I will do anything I can to help you.

Today the Catholic Church in New Hampshire acknowledges and accepts responsibility for the failures in our system that contributed to the endangerment of children. We commit ourselves in a public and binding way to address the weaknesses in our structure regarding the protection not only of children, but also of everyone who has a relationship with the Church. In acknowledging our failures, we are saying to everyone who has been hurt by the inexcusable and criminal actions of some priests that I and the other leaders of the Church in New Hampshire are sincerely sorry for the harm that you have endured. Our sorrow rises from within the core of our hearts. We know that you bear the pain of this abuse, and we want to shoulder some of that load first by asking for your forgiveness and secondly by pledging you our sincere support.

Today my signature to this agreement signifies that a new day has dawned for the Church in New Hampshire, one that is marked by cooperation with civil authorities for the betterment and

safety of our society. The Christian faith requires everyone who sins or commits a crime to humble self, confess sin, beg forgiveness and then make a firm purpose to amend one's life.

In my agreement with the Attorney General, who ensures the public safety of our State, I, as the Bishop of our Church in New Hampshire, acknowledge the Church's failings to protect children. We ask forgiveness from victims and all those in our State who have been hurt or scandalized by the terrible acts of abuse. We stand before the people of New Hampshire today with a firm purpose never to let this happen again.

I know there are many hearing my words who ask if we can be trusted to act to protect children in the future given the sad history of abuse by some priests, and the inadequate response of our Church at times. To them I point to our commitment in this formal agreement. We intend to take quick, clear and consistent action on every single allegation of abuse of a minor. What about protection? This agreement is our simple and unambiguous pledge. Now, we have a public mechanism whereby, in cooperation with the State of New Hampshire, we assure those who might doubt our resolve that we are committed to translating our words into actions.

As we turn our gaze from the past to the future, there is one point I want to make clear to everyone. Since February of this year, we have learned that there have been more priests who abused children than we knew, and the measures that we used were not adequate. However, I do not believe that any past bishop or member of the administration of the Diocese of Manchester ever intended to place children in harm's way. We made mistakes. The victims of abuse suffered for those mistakes. The faithful suffered damaged trust in our Church leaders. The Church has suffered both in the bruised and strained relationships that have developed among the members, and in the way this scandal has diverted attention away from the good things the Church does to fulfill its mission.

Where do we go from here? By acknowledging our failing, and committing ourselves to ever grow in our understanding of the amount of harm done to victims and the necessity of ensuring a safe environment for all our children, I commit our Church to the specific resolves of this

agreement without burdening the victims and everyone to a legal process between the State and the Diocese that would inflict further pain for an indefinite period:

- A process that would have added nothing to healing and be quite painful to many victims;
- A process that would have been one of conflict between the State and the Diocese rather than one of cooperation.
- And, a process that would have sapped people's spirit and the resources of the Church, without addressing constructively the way the Church could do a better job in the future.

In a few moments, Father Edward Arsenault and Attorney Ovide Lamontagne will address what the Church in New Hampshire has been doing to deal actively with the serious problem of child abuse and how these efforts relate so well to the various elements in this agreement between the Diocese of Manchester and the Attorney General. Before I do so, however, I want to close with a few final observations.

Reaching this agreement has not been an easy process. It was a challenge to ensure that our attorneys think less like lawyers and more like pastoral counselors. Just as I instructed Father Arsenault and our attorneys to reach out to victims in ways that are not confrontational, I directed that our discussions with the State be as cooperative as possible. I required that they measure their actions by what would bring the greatest relief to victims, the faithful, the clergy and the general public. I commend our attorneys for adhering to these values, recognizing that it was not always easy to do this at times. I also publicly acknowledge the Attorney General and the men and women of his office for their effort in achieving this agreement.

What we are accomplishing today is not about me, or any single person in our Church. During this year I have been humbled. I have heard many people of deep faith express confusion and dismay about our Church, our actions and inactions, and about me as a priest and Bishop. I serve as a priest because I believe in my heart God has called me to serve in this way. I serve as Bishop because the Holy Father asked me to be the Shepherd of this Diocese. I do both with sincere humility and a strong desire to be a servant of our Lord.

As I reflect over all that has happened here and in Boston, I know that, with the insight I have gained into my own failures, I daily ask God for the grace to do all I can to improve myself personally, as one who hungers and thirsts for the peace of Christ to come to victims and the Church. So, it is my intention to continue to work day and night to lead the Church to be a place of safety for all and an example of how to take all that we have learned with regard to abuse to develop a better life for our children and our communities.

I began by saying that there is a new light in our state today. For the people who have walked in darkness, this light illuminates both the flaws and the beauty of the Church. By focusing on one to the exclusion of the other, we fail to see the full picture. Just as the acts of some priests over the last sixty years – who did horrible things and harmed far too many innocents – have colored our view of the Church, I ask you to also look at the hundreds of other priests who served the people and toiled in the fields of the Lord with very little complaint. Let the brilliance of their love and devotion add to the light shining on the Church so that the picture is full, detailed and complete.

No matter how dreadful parts of our past may be, we are the Church of Christ; we are a people of hope. I implore all men and women of good will to join us as we walk in the light and make our Church the beacon of safety, love, protection and salvation that it must be.

I ask God's blessing on all of you here and throughout the State of New Hampshire.