

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

Office of the Archbishop



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May 30, 2010

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ Jesus:

On this Feast of the Most Blessed Trinity, we reflect on how God's mysterious unity is shared by three Divine Persons. That divine unity in relationship anchors our life as Christ's disciples in his body, the Church. Recently, our unity, our relationships are strained anew by reports of the sexual abuse of young people by priests and bishops. I have been encouraged to speak to you today by those whom I have recently consulted including the Council of Priests, the Archdiocesan Women's Committee, the wives of the deacons ordained just last week and many others.

First of all, these stories are about victims, young boys and girls, who were taken advantage of by those in whom they and their families had placed complete trust. Even though the abuse took place twenty to thirty or more years ago, the damage is long lasting and often devastating, and their pain affects all who are with them in the Church. I have spoken with dozens of adult survivors of sexual abuse and sometimes also with members of their families. I have tried to listen and have offered apologies, but the primary concern that all victims share is that no one else ever be abused as they were.

Victims have frequently blamed themselves or have felt alone and shamed. We owe a debt of gratitude to the groups that have assured victims that they are not the only ones who were abused. The Archdiocesan Office for the Protection of Children and Youth was formed so that victims can continue to be accompanied for as long as it is helpful. The healing garden is now being planned adjacent to Holy Family Church on Roosevelt Road with involvement by the victims/survivors. It promises to be a help for achieving personal peace and reconciliation and will be one means of assuring that this crisis will have a permanent impact on pastoral life.

So that all children will be safe, the Archdiocese has instituted training for adults to watch for signs of abuse in children. This training is mandatory for bishops, priests, deacons, teachers, youth ministers and all those, even volunteers, who are in frequent contact with children. Children themselves in our schools and religious education programs have been shown how to recognize and report any advance that makes them uncomfortable. Every report of sexual abuse of a minor, no matter when it is said to have taken place, is reported to the civil law enforcement authorities by the Archdiocese. No priest against whom an allegation of sexual abuse of children has been sustained is in ministry in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Mistakes have been made here and elsewhere, even as we have learned much and tried to integrate our learning into an ever-expanding healing environment. I cannot speak with any personal knowledge of the situation outside of the United States, but I can say that Pope Benedict the XVI now and before he was elected Bishop of Rome was always clear in his resolve that the priesthood must be purified of any sexual predators and that prayers for the victims should be part of our lives.

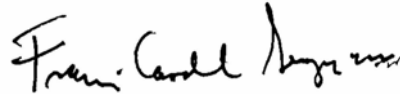
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I hope and pray that God will strengthen and heal those who have been abused sexually by priests or anyone else. The Archdiocese continues to ask those who have suffered abuse to come forward. Contact information is available on the Archdiocese of Chicago's webpage. The phone number of the Office for the Protection of Children and Youth is published in parish bulletins and in the *Catholic New World*.

We believe that God can bring good out of evil. He can heal victims and grant forgiveness to those who repent of the crime of sexual abuse or any other sin. We stand before the mystery of God's inner life today and we pray that the love that is God's nature may be more fully shared among us now. You are in my prayers and I ask for yours. God bless you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francis Cardinal George". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "F" and a stylized "G".

Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.
Archbishop of Chicago