

REV. EDWARD J. ARSENAULT
REMARKS REGARDING AGREEMENT WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL
DECEMBER 10, 2002

Good afternoon. Today we close one door, so as to open another.

The announcement of today's Agreement between the Diocese of Manchester and the State of New Hampshire is a new, significant step in the ongoing commitment of the leaders of the Catholic Church in New Hampshire to ensure that all persons, especially children and young people, are safe in our churches, schools and institutions. This public commitment to transparent, accountable structures for raising awareness of child sexual abuse, committing significant resources to the prevention of child sexual abuse and the quick, caring and cooperative response of the Church to suspicions of child sexual abuse by anyone in church ministry has one goal in mind: no child should ever be afraid to trust an adult, young or old and especially a priest — and if they do fear harm, they should know how to respond.

I am pleased to be here this afternoon, along with my colleagues in the Office of The Delegate: Joseph Naff, a clinical social worker who provides pastoral care to persons who make allegations and their families, and Diane Murphy Quinlan, who assists me in the administration of our diocesan policy and procedures. Joe is also of enormous assistance to Bishop McCormack directly in the pastoral care of parishes affected by the loss of their parish priest when an accusation is proven credible, the provision of counseling services by providers of any victim's choice and the coordination of private meetings between the Bishop and victims who wish to meet with him personally. Joe has also pioneered the development of a victim support group ministry that will be unveiled shortly after the Christmas holidays. Bethany: A Place for Healing and New Life will be a support group program sponsored by N.H. Catholic Charities, the Catholic parishes and the Christian faithful of New Hampshire. In providing a safe, nurturing and faith-filled environment for all victims of child sexual abuse, we hope to establish the Catholic Church in New Hampshire as a place of sanctuary for those who wish to turn to the Lord together to seek healing. Diane assists the Bishop directly as well, especially in the coordination of mediations between victims and the Diocese. She also is responsible for assisting the Task Force on Sexual Misconduct Policy and is coordinating the further development of screening tools for candidates for ordained ministry and those whom we employ in the pastoral work of the Church in the Catholic parishes, schools and institutions of New Hampshire as well as age appropriate resources for parents to use with their children in raising awareness of child abuse.

When he arrived in New Hampshire in 1998, Bishop McCormack made the further development of our Diocesan Policy on Sexual Misconduct one of his first priorities. In addition to the establishment of the Diocesan Review Board, Bishop McCormack also developed the position of a Delegate for Sexual Misconduct. Bishop McCormack appointed me as his Delegate in January 2000 and directed me to continue to develop not only the responsive protocols of the Diocese to reports of sexual misconduct, but also to forge ahead into the more effective efforts of a proactive response of raising awareness of the terrible reality of child sexual abuse in our Church and in our society and of establishing ways to prevent child sexual abuse from ever occurring in our churches, our schools or our homes. The Diocese of Manchester committed personnel and other resources to the development of the nationally recognized Protecting God's Children safety training program and NH was selected as a pilot in the implementation of this state-of-the-art interactive training model. The Diocese of Manchester has trained over 2,500 priests, religious and employees from our parishes, schools and institutions. We are currently implementing the training for volunteers and parents in our parishes and schools and will begin implementing an online training program for all clergy, employees and volunteers in 2003. Interactive, age appropriate training material for children and young people is currently under development and planned for implementation in 2003 as well.

Bishop McCormack also insisted that any responses by our Office of Legal Affairs to reports made by persons represented by attorneys, either through demands for settlement or formal lawsuits, be treated with the same pastoral care as any reports made through the Office of the Delegate. This unified pastoral response has allowed the Diocese of Manchester to effectively respond to the hundreds of persons who have come to us, either through the Office of the Delegate or the Office of Legal Affairs, which I also coordinate, in a manner that has allowed us to reach mutually satisfactory solutions for healing in many, many instances. We still have a great deal of work to do. For those who have begun a journey of healing, we are in the fragile stages of re-establishing trusting relationships. I ask that you pray that these important relationships between victims and the Church be established in a lasting and trusting way. We are also working diligently to come to mutually acceptable solutions for healing for new complainants who have come to us represented by legal counsel. Likewise, I ask that you join me in asking the Lord to watch over our careful response to persons harmed by others in the Church. I must say, the expansion of my staff to include two additional well qualified lay persons (who like most of my colleagues in the diocesan administration are both parents themselves) has only served to enhance the ministry of the Diocese of Manchester. I treasure not

only their expertise and their gifts, but also their dedication as people of faith and fine parents of children. Together, as baptized Christian faithful: laity, religious and clergy, we are honored to serve those most in need.

As I said earlier, the announcement of today's Agreement between the Diocese of Manchester and the State of New Hampshire is a new, significant step in the ongoing commitment of the leaders of the Catholic Church in New Hampshire to ensure that all persons, especially children and young people, are safe in our churches, schools and institutions. We have one goal in mind: no child should ever be afraid to trust an adult, young or old and especially a priest — and if they do fear harm, they should know how to respond.

Much of what has been committed to writing in this Agreement has been in place in New Hampshire prior to the establishment of national priorities by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in their Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. The structure of today's Agreement complements the substance of work already begun, but which can only improve with further scrutiny and development. The Church has learned the painful lesson that we cannot solve the crime of sexual abuse in private or alone. Child sexual abuse will only be prevented when everyone is committed to its eradication through the further development of a culture of common accountability. In making this significant stride today, the Catholic Church in New Hampshire seeks to take the lead not only in the publicity of our failings, but also in our resolve to help anyone heal and to achieve a safe environment in our state for children, young people and adults who were harmed as minors.

Today's Agreement between the Diocese of Manchester and the State of New Hampshire makes public several important commitments.

1. A commitment to an enhanced reporting protocol that exceeds N.H. state law. In addition to continuing to comply with the mandatory reporting laws of N.H. and using the reporting standards in the statute, all church personnel are obliged to report any concerns that another person in church ministry may have abused a minor to local law enforcement and to the Office of the Delegate. The Office of the Delegate will inform local law enforcement of all reports received from anyone, child or adult, of child sexual abuse by any church personnel in the past or the present.
2. A commitment to ongoing cooperation between the Office of the Delegate and any law enforcement and human service offices of the State of New Hampshire in the investigation of reports of child sexual abuse.

3. A re-commitment to the diocesan and national policy that any person alleged to have sexually abused a minor will be relieved of all ministerial duties pending the outcome of an investigation by civil and church authorities.
4. A re-commitment that any person — priest, deacon, religious, lay employee or volunteer — who is proven to have sexually abused a minor, in the past or in the present, will not be allowed to provide any ministry in the Church.
5. A re-commitment to an ongoing review of all policies and procedures associated with the prevention and response to child sexual abuse.
6. A re-commitment to state-of-the-art training for all church personnel regarding awareness and safety measures for the prevention of child sexual abuse in the Church and in society.
7. A commitment to an annual compliance audit by the Office of the Attorney General for a period of five years, beginning in 2002 and concluding in 2007.

Finally, my office has provided a Fact Sheet that details the number of accusations sexual misconduct which have been reported to the Diocese, an analysis of the demographics of accused persons and a summary report of financial settlements reached with persons who have sought assistance from the Church. That same information will be made available publicly through our diocesan website and through my office. This disclosure is a further effort by the Diocese of Manchester to ensure the Christian faithful and the people of New Hampshire that they can trust the Catholic Church to be forthright and responsive to the painful reality of child sexual abuse in our Church and our society.