

A look back at how far we have come

There has been much information in the *Idaho Statesman* and other media outlets regarding the response of the Catholic Church to allegations of clergy sexual abuse here in the U.S. and in Europe. Much of this information highlights the past failures of the church in dealing swiftly and forcefully with the crime and sin of sexual abuse by clergy. Regrettably, there is certainly truth to such statements. However, it seems to me that much of this same information seems to imply that the Catholic Church continues to engage in secretive practices that protect priest perpetrators and endanger children and youth. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Over the years, we as bishops have made a vigorous commitment to do everything in our power to prevent abuse from happening to children and youth. As the Executive Committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops noted, "We live out this commitment through the 'Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People,' which calls us to respond with compassion to victims/survivors, to work diligently to screen those working with children and young people in the church, to provide child abuse awareness and prevention education, to report suspected abuse to civil law enforcement, and to account for

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By Bishop Michael P. Driscoll

our efforts to protect children and youth through an external annual national audit."

In the Diocese of Boise, every individual who works with children and youth is required to undergo a criminal background check and to receive formal training through our Safe Environment Program. Annual audits conducted by a national, independent firm have found our diocese to be in compliance with every mandate set to ensure that children and youth are safe in our churches, our programs and our Catholic communities. A Diocesan Review Board comprised of psychologists, attorneys, social workers, abuse counselors and other qualified professionals exists to help advise me on issues related to possible clergy sexual abuse. It has taken much work

and many resources, but all of these efforts have made our communities safe places to gather and worship.

Nowhere is this commitment

with clergy sexual abuse in the past. He has strengthened the church's response to victims and has implemented significant reforms in the way the Catholic Church handles allegations of sexual abuse. He has called for greater internal accountability and the open and transparent cooperation of church leaders with civil authorities. Above all, he has publicly and remorsefully acknowledged our sinfulness as a church and sought forgiveness.

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to the protection of children and youth more evident than in the person of our Holy Father. Pope Benedict XVI has publicly acknowledged the church's sin in failing to act aggressively

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Catholic faith. We know we are all sinners. Yet, each and every day, we celebrate our belief in the unconditional love of God who accepts us in our sinfulness and reconciles us through the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we struggle with this ongoing crisis in our church, I ask for your understanding, your forgiveness, and, above all, your prayers. I ask your forgiveness for those times when the church and her ministers failed to treat you with respect and dignity or failed to live faithfully the teachings of our faith. I ask you to pray for all those innocent victims who have been harmed by the sin of sexual abuse by clergy. I ask you to pray for the priests of our diocese who are giving good and faithful service to our parish communities, but who are now bearing the shame associated with the abuse of children and youth by Catholic priests. I ask you to pray for me that I can continue to guide our diocese with wisdom, compassion and courage. Finally, I ask you to pray for our pope, for our church and for the holiness of all our members. May we never be afraid to humbly acknowledge our faults and failings and open ourselves to the healing and transforming power of the God who reconciles all things to himself.

Saint Alphonsus Health System applauded

These are challenging times for the field of health care. The federal legislation that recently passed – and on this point, supporters and detractors agree – will create seismic changes in the way health care is provided during the next decade.

The Latin expression "*Audaces vita iuvat*" translates as "Life favors the bold" and nowhere was that more evident than on April 6 when Catholic healthcare leaders from Interstate 84 corridor gathered in Boise to announce the formation of the Saint Alphonsus Health System. The system combines the efforts of Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center in Boise; Mercy Medical Center in Nampa; St. Elizabeth Health Services in Baker City, Ore.; and Holy Rosary Medical Center in Ontario, Ore. The new organization emerges as a 714-bed giant that registers 26,600 annual inpatient admissions, 114,300 annual emergency room visits, a medical staff of 945 and 4,300 full- and part-time employees. The Saint Alphonsus Health System will operate under the national, parent organization of Trinity Health.

There are several reasons why this is good news. First, given the ongoing uncertainty

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of how the federal changes will affect health care providers, there is certain strength in numbers. The recent economic collapse has shown that large corporate structures, not immune to severe times, at least have the diversity and the resources to survive when smaller ones cannot. The combined efforts of a regional Catholic hospital network bode better for the long-range survival of all of its members than the fate of each member struggling on its own.

Second, there are economies of scale – the superior purchasing power of larger units. For instance, buying 100,000 surgical masks by the health system purchasing department will undoubtedly cost less than if each hospital purchased 25,000 surgical masks on their own. Reduced costs translate into savings for the hospital and consumers.

Third, there can be shared resources within the group. For instance, St. Elizabeth's provided \$2.5 million in uncompensated care last year, a commitment to mission that might prove crushing to long-term financial health. Meanwhile, the larger siblings in the group



Saint Alphonsus Health System

A NEW BRAND OF MEDICINE IS HERE

offer dozens of diverse services that can help offset the cost of such charitable work. Likewise, medical services that some members offer as specialties, such as Saint Alphonsus' new state-of-the-art maternity center and neonatal ICU, can be offered to patients from other parts of the health system.

Finally, it ensures a Catholic health care presence in the region for years to come. Local governing boards will continue to oversee each member's operations, and the larger health system board will include representatives of all its members. A press statement announcing the formation of the new corporate structure said that, by combin-

ing the efforts of the four Catholic institutions, Saint Alphonsus Health System "will ensure that this Gospel ministry of healing and hope continues throughout this new century."

At the public event organizers called a "Ritual of Transition," Bishop Michael P. Driscoll spoke eloquently about his vision for this new endeavor: "We depend on one another to provide for the needs of the sick, and we attend to the health of the whole person – spirit as well as body. That is the call, the mission, the strength of Catholic healthcare."

To which we add: Amen, and best wishes.