



## Spotlight on Betrayal

The Catholic Church in the United States observes April as Child Abuse Prevention Month. This year it comes in the wake of Spotlight's winning the Academy Award for Best Picture—a fitting coincidence with this issue's annual update on our Child and Youth Protection Program in the Diocese of Baker.

Spotlight artfully and accurately tells the dramatic story of the Boston Globe's explosive 2002 exposure of priestly sex abuse. Day after day prize-winning reporters documented physical and psychological violation of young people, and—worst of all—unconscionable cover-ups by bishops. Those whose souls were scarred forever by priestly betrayal must find Spotlight a very painful film to sit through. If you are one of them, I pray and hope that the Church in which you were so deeply wounded can help bring about your healing. If you have not yet come forward to make your suffering known, I humbly encourage you to do so.

In the year the Boston Globe brought the crime and sin of child abuse undeniably and unforgettably to light, the American Bishops approved the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, acknowledged disastrous mistakes, and vowed to deal “strongly, consistently, and effectively in the future” with sexual abuse by priests. Spotlight quite rightly highlights the crucial role of the press in bringing about these necessary changes. And they have borne fruit, for reports

of child abuse in the Church continue to decline with each passing year.

Diocesan Review Boards were established to guard against the covering up of abuse and abusers by bishops or other Church authorities. Our Board in the Diocese of Baker is well suited to this task. Its members bring high competency and wide experience to bear on the crucially important task of assuring our children's safety.

On the national level, the Bishops' Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People is charged with ensuring national implementation of and faithful adherence to the 2002 Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. (I just completed my first year as a member.) Composed of 16 bishops and 10 consultants from all around the country, the Committee holds four meetings a year, two of them jointly with the National Review Board of lay Catholic experts which gives its own report each year to all the bishops assembled in Baltimore.

The tragic experience of clergy sexual abuse has taught the Church in the United States a very painful lesson: if we fail to be vigilant in protecting our children, they will suffer dearly from our negligence. We owe it to them to promote an ever-widening awareness of sexual abuse and how it happens. For sexual predators take great pains to keep their dark purposes hidden from view. Masters of deception and manipulation, they exploit whatever social assets they have to circumvent parental precautions and gain access to the vulnerable. But the prospect of public exposure is a powerful deterrent to those who would prey upon the innocent. Widespread parish

(and community) vigilance creates an environment unfriendly to abusers, and precisely such vigilance is what our Child Protection Program is designed to promote.

Time does not stand still. The world of 2015 is not the world of 2002. By God's grace and the courage of victims who made injustice known we have been able to create an environment in the Catholic Church that truly is safer for children and worthy of the faith we proclaim. But we must continue to be vigilant to preserve what has been gained at such cost so that those who come after us do not suffer the horrors which Spotlight so effectively dramatizes.