



In the Spotlight

This is the month for the release of *Spotlight*—a much promoted movie about the *Boston Globe*'s explosive disclosure of priestly sex abuse in 2002. Day after day prize-winning reporters brought the horrors to light — physical and psychological violation, betrayal of sacred trust, manipulation of the innocent, scandalous cover-ups on the part of bishops. The crisis was painful to live through then; brought to the screen, it will be painful to sit through now—especially for the many victims whose souls were scarred forever by priests who abused them.

To those of you who bear those wounds I renew and make my own the apologies that have been spoken by popes and bishops in the 13 years since the *Globe* broke the story. As a parish priest I listened as people like you told me what they had suffered, and I can never forget the pain and disappointment, the isolation and confusion which they—and you—went through. I pray and hope that the Church in which you were so deeply wounded can help bring about your continued healing. If you have not yet come forward to make your suffering known, I humbly encourage you to do so.

As the pages of 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 with sexual abuse by priests “strongly, consistently, and effectively in the future.”

To appreciate the effectiveness of this promise we need only recall the corrective actions the *Charter* brought about in the afterglow of *Spotlight* and which have been put in place here in the Diocese of Baker:

- outreach to victims in a spirit of reconciliation
- establishment of a Diocesan Review Board whose members are professional lay men and women experienced in the protection of children
- prohibition of confidentiality agreements
- mandatory reporting of allegations to public authorities
- zero tolerance of sexual abuse by priests or deacons
- Diocesan code of conduct for all employees and volunteers who work with youth
- open and transparent communication about allegations of abuse
- training of adults to create and maintain safe environments for children and youth

- training children to recognize and report grooming behavior
- background checks on all clergy and lay volunteers who work with children
- prohibition of transfers of clergy who have committed an act of sexual abuse against a minor
- ongoing formation of clergy.

Spotlight 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. 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 that came to light in 2002.