

Statement on the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Proposed Policy for Cases of Sexual Abuse

I welcome the general thrust of the draft issued today by the Ad Hoc Committee because it includes elements already in place in the policy of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. These are immediate removal from ministry pending full investigation and psychological evaluation for priests who are accused, outreach to victims, reporting of allegations immediately to civil authorities, and creating independent lay review boards to review policies and personnel.

I do have some questions about one aspect of the document. The committee appears to be looking for a way to put adequate safeguards on someone returning to ministry after having committed a single act of abuse. This path we tried to follow here some years ago and we found that it did not work. An allegation of prior misconduct of which we had no knowledge surfaced after the individual had been returned to ministry.

At our meeting in Dallas I shall advocate a policy that says that one offense is one too many-this is also known as zero tolerance. I shall also advocate that all allegations of child sexual abuse be reported immediately to civil authorities and that we should emphasize that children and victims are our greatest concern.

At this point to do otherwise would be a disservice to our people and to society at large.

What I am advocating is the policy now in place in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and this will remain our archdiocesan policy.

Cardinal William H. Keeler
Archbishop of Baltimore