



March 24, 2009

Dear Voice of the Faithful Members,

You can play a part in helping Religious Institutes (Orders) of Men and Religious Congregations of Women in your area protect children from abuse by their members. VOTF asks for your assistance in reaching out to members of religious orders, especially ones with whom you have had personal contact, to ensure that they are doing all they can to protect children.

This personal outreach is important. Currently, diocesan priests and deacons are subject to the U.S. Bishop's Charter on the Protection of Children and Youth. Priests and deacons in Religious Institutes also are subject to the Charter. But communities of Brothers and Nuns are not subject to the Charter. Unfortunately, we know that there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of survivors of sexual abuse by Brothers and Nuns. Yet because these communities are not covered by the Charter, these survivors are not counted in the reports from the bishops' National Review Board. (See www.bishopaccountability.com.)

Many of you attended schools, high schools, colleges and even graduate schools run by these Religious Institutes and Congregations. You may well have friends and good contacts who are members, and even superiors, of these Religious Institutes and Congregations. In a spirit of collaboration rather than confrontation, we ask you to reach out to them, to see if they are doing all that they can to protect children and youth. In this letter, we offer you beginning steps, and what to do with the information once you gather it. For the Talking Points, please check the links on the VOTF web site.

Beginning Steps

1. Become familiar with the issue as it applies to Religious Institutes and Congregations by:
 - Reviewing the vocabulary summary (attached)
 - Going to the referenced websites and reading their statements on child sexual abuse
2. Contact Ron Dubois, chair of the NRC Religious Orders Committee (debber@beld.net, 781- 843-1676) to let him know which Order(s) you are contacting to avoid duplication.



3. Identify the appropriate person to talk with in the Religious Institute or Congregation. Ideally talk with the person responsible for monitoring child sexual abuse. Make sure you are talking to someone who trusts and respects you. If you are not sure, make the effort to cultivate their trust.
4. Convey respect and appreciation for the good works that the particular order you are speaking with has done in the past and continues to do. (It's best if you can give an example or two of the charism of the order and how that has built up the body of Christ.)

Concluding Steps:

1. Summarize the answers you received to the nine Talking Point questions.
2. Send your responses to Donna Doucette at the VOTF national office dbdoucette@votf.org
3. Although these discussions can happen at any time, for the sake of timeliness, we will be collating the data from your interviews by May 30, 2009, and would appreciate your responses by then.

Thank you for helping in the ongoing work of protecting children and supporting survivors of sexual abuse.

Sincerely,
Ron DuBois
Religious Orders Subcommittee
VOTF National Representative Council