

Voice of the Faithful of Greater Philadelphia

P.O. Box 4397, Philadelphia, PA 19118-8397

September 22, 2006

Cardinal Justin Rigali
Archdiocese of Philadelphia
222 N. 17th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Dear Cardinal Rigali:

Please know that we prayed with you and for you as you listened to survivors during the “Witness to the Sorrow” on September 15. We too have experienced at first hand how deeply emotive and painful, but also motivating, such listening can be.

The Witness, to all accounts, was a deeply moving event with much promise for the future. We see it as a step in the right direction by the Archdiocese in raising awareness of the wounds, not only of sexual abuse victims, but of the entire Catholic community. We respectfully encourage you to continue listening, along with our bishops and priests. We also encourage you to take the strong, committed and long-term action which must flow from such listening and from our collective experience of remorse.

You will recall the four proposals we made in a letter to you on Oct. 18, 2005, to support needed changes in state laws, meet personally with survivors, set up lay-elected parish Child Safety Committees, and hold accountable those responsible for covering up abuse. Since much has transpired in the last year, we are attaching a list of four new proposals for action. Should you desire to communicate to us about them, we would be happy to respond.

Please know that we continue to pray for you and for ourselves that our Communion will find the grace to discern how to respond with justice to—and compassion for—survivors’ needs and to make our Church safe for our precious children.

Sincerely in Christ,

Robert Jensen, Chair
For the Steering Committee,
Voice of the Faithful of Greater Philadelphia

ACTION PROPOSALS TO THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

Build on the September 15, 2006, “Witness to the Sorrow”

“It is important for us to hear their stories firsthand so that we may see the human face and hear the human voice.” (Cardinal Rigali, Sept. 15, 2006)

1. INVITE SURVIVORS TO SPEAK IN PARISHES

The basic idea of having people listen at first hand to survivors’ stories and then take their experience into prayer is a very positive one. In addition to bishops and priests, many more of the faithful would benefit greatly from having the same experience. *Therefore, we recommend that you actively encourage archdiocesan priests to invite survivors to speak in their parishes. We also recommend that such presentations be followed up with prayer services to seek God’s guidance on what parishioners can do in response.* (We know that many survivors have experienced such hurt from representatives of the church that they probably would not respond positively to such an invitation. As the Sept. 15 Witness shows, however, others are willing to share their stories.)

2. INVITE SURVIVORS TO WRITE THEIR STORIES IN THE “STANDARD AND TIMES”

To make sure that as many of the faithful as possible hear the survivors’ stories, *we recommend that you invite survivors to tell their stories in the Catholic Standard and Times* (As you probably know, Bishop Skylstad in Spokane has agreed to have the diocesan newspaper make available up to one full page an issue for the next two years for victims to publish their stories).

3. SUPPORT LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

As president of the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference, *we urge you to instruct the PCC’s lobbyists to actively support the child protection legislation before the Pennsylvania General Assembly, especially bills to extend the statute of limitations for crimes of sexual abuse and to “open a window” for survivors to bring their cases by waiving for one year the SOL on civil lawsuits.* Support for these bills is valuable not only on their merits, but also because news reports and some observers suggest that the PCC is opposing the “window” legislation and is giving lukewarm, if any, support to the SOL-extension bills. As you know, coming before the courts is one of the very few ways that survivors can hope for some measure of justice for what they have had to endure.

4. SELL THE MANSION ON CARDINAL AVE.; USE THE PROCEEDS TO HELP SURVIVORS

Such a dramatic and faith-filled action could do more than anything else to show your sincere commitment to survivors’ welfare. Archbishop Sean O’Malley’s sale of the bishop’s mansion in Boston shows that such a step is feasible and beneficial, both financially and morally. The financial benefits to survivors are obvious, since they would provide compensation for those whose cases ran out because of the statute of limitations. We also believe that the moral benefits of such a decision would rebound to the spiritual benefit of the archdiocese, since it would show even more clearly our leader’s commitment to live as Jesus did: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay his head” (Mt. 8:20). Our city has many neighborhoods where you could reside modestly while also having opportunities to reach out directly to the poor and needy as Jesus did.