

Letter from bulletin of April 14, 2002

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Dear Parishioners,

On Friday evening April 5th we held an open forum on the tragic and painful issue of sexual abuse of minors and its irresponsible handling by Church leaders. About 140 parishioners spent close to two hours in strongly put questions and serious sharing of concern. We (and I include myself) expressed sadness, anger and dismay. The issues addressed included: the victims (our children, their family members, parishioners and priests); the abusers (who may at one time have been abused and victims themselves, but must be held accountable and removed from positions of responsibility and risk); the bishops (with 194 independent dioceses there are many exceptions but maintaining secrecy and avoiding "scandal" was all too frequently their principal goal); the priests (according to an expert quoted by Time Magazine, the best data we have suggests that Catholic clergy involved with minors is at the same percentage as in other professions and the general population - one Chicago study put it at an even lower 1.8% - but criminal activity when reported was not halted immediately and victims multiplied); a variety of related issues (mandatory celibacy, seminary procedures, homosexuality, the role of laity and especially women in Church, the clerical culture); what do we tell our children; other Church's experiences and the role of the media.

The discussion was frank and the questions many. My impression was that the issue of mandatory celibacy was the one item raised most frequently. While our own Diocese of Oakland received praise for its proactive way of dealing with victims, the persistent question was what can we do and what do we do next. Two suggestions received almost unanimous support. 1) That we continue the discussion openly and publicly of all the related issues; 2) That we fashion a petition to our

Bishops, meeting nationally in June, urging concrete and specific measures. Our Social Justice ministry has already begun to prepare such a statement. In response, I recommend the following. First, that we hold a second open forum on Friday evening, April 19th; secondly, that at the meeting, among other things, we also brainstorm as to what a petition to the U.S. Bishops might include, and that we contact neighboring parishes to see if they too would support such a petition. I would hope its suggestions would be brief, specific and reasonably attainable. Consider joining us again on April 19th, or feel free to contact me with your comments personally in writing or through the guest book link on our parish website.

Your Pastor,
Brian T. Joyce