

Bishop Latino's Statement

Statement of Bishop Joseph N. Latino on the release of the National Audit

January 6, 2004

JACKSON — In June 2002, the United States bishops issued the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People." Since that time, the Diocese of Jackson has devoted substantial effort to fulfill the goals of the Dallas Charter and to ensure a safe environment for children in all of its parishes, schools and institutions.

The Diocese has updated its 1994 revised policy regarding sexual misconduct and abuse to incorporate the Dallas Charter and its Norms. As bishop of the Diocese, I approved the updated policy on Oct. 10, 2003. A copy of this policy is available on our website, www.jacksondiocese.org.

In conjunction with implementation of the updated policy and the Dallas Charter and its Norms, the Diocese has conducted training sessions for parish, school and diocesan staff on creating a safe environment for children and youth. Also the Diocese has broadened its system for criminal background checks to cover all its employees and significant volunteers who minister with children and youth.

To ensure that each diocese was implementing and adhering to the Charter and its Norms, the United States bishops committed to an audit of compliance for all dioceses conducted by the Gavin Group, Inc., an independent firm in Boston headed by retired FBI official William Gavin.

This past October 20-24, 2003, the Diocese of Jackson was visited by members of the Gavin Group for the audit of compliance concerning the national Charter. Two members of the Gavin Group, both retired FBI agents, conducted a series of interviews and visits throughout the Diocese. The retired FBI agents reported that our Diocese was in compliance with the national Charter. We later received written confirmation that the Diocese was **in compliance** with the Charter. In addition to the confirmation, the Diocese received the following four special commendations:

- For the appearance of Bishop Latino on a statewide televised panel discussion, which included the state coordinator of a major advocacy group, regarding the issue of sexual abuse of minors.
- For an excellent sexual abuse prevention policy, which has been in existence in the Diocese since 1986 and has been continually updated and improved.

- For the establishment of a review board in 1994, and the excellence of the composition and activities of the board.

- For the excellence of the Diocese's cooperation with civil authorities in dealing with matters of sexual abuse of minors.

Even though the audit results establish that our Diocese is in compliance with the Charter, we know we must continue to work to guarantee a safe environment for all who enter our churches, schools and institutions. The Diocese of Jackson is committed to ensuring that children being served by the Church are not at risk of sexual abuse by Church personnel. The spiritual well-being of all the victims, their families, and others in the community is of particular concern to the Church. In accordance with our policy, all victims of abuse are offered counseling and pastoral care.

The Diocese urges anyone who has been a victim of abuse by church personnel and has not yet reported the abuse to please come forward and do so. Our Victim Assistance Coordinator, Mrs. Linda Raff, a licensed social worker, is available to assist you in making a report. Contact Mrs. Raff at 601-355-8634.

Note: The entire text of the National Audit is available from the U.S. bishops' web site www.usccb.org. A copy of the Diocese of Jackson's policy and a summary of its audit is available on our diocesan web site www.jacksondiocese.org.