

# CATHOLIC CALENDAR.

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## Bishop Braxton addresses sexual abuse of children

In a letter read in all Catholic Churches in the Diocese of Lake Charles last weekend, April 6-7, Bishop Edward K. Braxton addressed the issue of the sexual abuse of children by priests, stating, "I wish to assure you that there are no priests serving anywhere in the Diocese of Lake Charles against whom credible or substantiated allegations of sexual misconduct with children have been made. Should I receive such allegations the priest would be removed from pastoral ministry immediately." (The letter has been reprinted elsewhere on this page.)

Bishop Braxton, who has previously addressed the wide spread allegations against American priests in his homilies at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, discussed the topic with the priests and deacons of the diocese during the annual afternoon of reflection the Wednesday before Easter. He thanked the priests and deacons for their ministry and told them not to be discouraged by the ongoing and inevitable media coverage of the crisis that has been exacerbated by the perception that some bishops did not deal with these allegations aggressively enough and did not report them to civil authorities.

The Bishop stressed the need for every priest to come to an authentic and honest understanding of his emotional, psychosocial and psychosexual make-up. He told them that they must appreciate their personal need for love, affirmation, and intimacy in their lives if they are to be able to determine appropriate, responsible ways of demonstrating affection that are consistent with their celibate commitment.

He noted that it is unfortunate, in his judgement, that much of the popular coverage of allegations against priests fails to distinguish adequately pedophilia (sexual attraction to children who have not reached puberty), ephebophilia, (sexual attraction to young people who have reached puberty), and homosexuality (sexual attraction to persons (usually adults) of the same sex).

He urged all of the priests to support each other especially in times of loneliness or undue pressure. He said that if any priest needed help in dealing with issues of sexual integration, the Diocese would be happy to assist them. He expressed his confidence that the vast majority of Catholic people in their parishes continued to respect and admire them for their dedicated service. Bishop Braxton gave his priests

copies of Pope John Paul II's Holy Thursday Letter to Priests and urged them to read all of it and not simply paragraph twelve which addresses the current controversy.

The Bishop's letter expresses his own personal shock, amazement, anger, sorrow and distress about "the terrible harm done to innocent children and their families by priests who betrayed the trust of those for whom they should have shown the greatest concern."

The letter also points out that "most of these offenses took place in the past, when the selection of candidates for the priesthood was not as strict as it is today." While stressing that the sexual abuse of even one child by a priest is unacceptable, Bishop Braxton pointed out that "of the nearly 50,000 priests in the United States, more than 98 percent serve faithfully each day without allegations of misconduct against them."

Special prayers of the faithful for the victims, their families, and their alleged abusers were prayed at all the weekend masses.

## Prayers of the Faithful

We pray for all who have been sexually abused by priests: that they may receive every form of spiritual, psychological and emotional assistance that they need to go forward with their lives confident that the authentic love of Jesus Christ embodied in the community around them has the power to heal. Let us pray to the Lord.

We pray for these victims and their families, whose anger and profound distrust of the Church and her priests is fully understandable: that, in time, they will be able to see the goodness of God and the work of Christ in the Catholic Church, in spite of the terrible failings of some of her ministers. Let us pray to the Lord.

We pray for the priests who are guilty of this abuse of children: that they may have the courage to express their deep sorrow to their victims and their families, be open to professional counseling, accept the judgments of civil authorities against them and trust in the mercy of God. Let us Pray to the Lord.

We pray for the bishops who have dealt with allegations of sexual abuse of children by priests in their dioceses and now regret some of their judgments and actions: that they may, from this day forward, follow pastoral practices that place the greatest emphasis upon the well being of innocent children. Let us Pray to the Lord.

We pray for those priests who have been falsely accused of the abuse of children and have experienced deep embarrassment, damage to their reputations and lost the trust of their people: that they may be able to forgive their false accusers and gradually find Christ's peace in their ministry. Let us Pray to the Lord.

## Catholic Bishops' Conference, Other Church Groups, File Brief

WASHINGTON — The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and three other religious organizations have asked the Supreme Court of the State of California to overturn a lower court ruling that would force Catholic Charities of Sacramento to provide insurance coverage of contraceptives for its employees.

"The legislation challenged here is the camel's nose under the tent, the cutting edge of an attempt, by making the church pay for what it explicitly opposes, in effect to silence a church's message and mission anytime it does not conform to the prevailing secular wisdom. That is a bad law, a bad policy, and unconstitutional," the church groups declared in a friend of the court brief. "Forcing Catholic Charities to pay for insurance coverage for contraceptives in its own workplace violates the First Amendment to the United States Constitution," they declared.

The organizations signing the brief said the case is about more than the issue of providing contraceptives, about which, they acknowledged, their own teachings do not necessarily agree.

"However, they recognize that this case seeks to establish a precedent dangerous to our national tradition of respecting the integrity of religious institutions against the intrusive power of the State," they said. "The State proposes a rule of law that forces a church institution, in violation of its own self-identity and constitution, to pay for something in its own workplace that the institution holds and teaches to be sinful. At issue is an effort by California to rewrite the church agency's self-definition...by forbidding it to practice in its own house what it preaches."

"If Catholic Charities constitutionally-grounded right of self-definition and autonomy is not vindicated here, no denomination will be safe from the threat of being reconstituted at the state's command," the brief warned.

"Today's case is about contraceptives. Tomorrow's will present some other issue that elicits public division, such as abortion, assisted suicide, cloning, or

some issue of self-governance, such as the use of resources for evangelization or who a religious agency may hire to do ministry work. Indeed, the State's preposterous claim that Catholic Charities is not a religious organization at all shows just how radical the State's agenda is."

According to the brief, the case presents an issue of historic consequence for all churches. "Once allowed, there is little in principle to stop further destructive intrusions into the self-governance and organization of churches, for if a church can be required...to provide or pay for particular programs or services even if repugnant to its deeply held religious convictions, it would seem that no church or church body is safe from the ad hoc nullification of its practices and teaching at the hands of the State."

As an example of the potentially far-reaching consequences of the law, the brief said that even Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charities could be forced out of existence by a law requiring them to pay for contraceptives, assisted suicides, or abortions. "This Court's intervention is necessary to prevent the state from attacking the integrity of Catholic Charities, as the State has done here, and other church agencies."

The brief said that if California could require Catholic Charities to provide contraceptives, the same logic would seem to allow the government to regulate selection of clergy under a law forbidding discrimination based on sex, forbid the celebration of Mass through a law forbidding possession and consumption of alcohol, and outlaw kosher slaughterhouses through laws regulating food handling-results that are all constitutionally impermissible.

In addition to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the other groups filing the amici brief were the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the International Church of the Four-square Gospel, and the Worldwide Church of God.



THE DIOCESE OF LAKE CHARLES

April 7, 2002

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Jesus Christ:

"Peace be with You!" This Easter greeting of Jesus Christ proclaimed in the gospel today announces a gift from the Risen Lord that is urgently needed in the Church in the United States. The spiritual peace of the penitential season of Lent was profoundly disturbed by the frequent announcements of allegations of the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests in this country. Some of these allegations have been substantiated and they have led to convictions. Many more would certainly lead to convictions if they had been made known to civil authorities in a timely manner. As a result bishops have been criticized for showing more concern for the priests against whom the allegations have been made than for the children in their pastoral care. I am sure that you have been praying with me each day for these dear children (many of whom are now adults) and their families. Let us continue to do so.

I share your shock, amazement, anger, sorrow and distress about the terrible harm done to innocent children and their families by priests who betrayed the trust of those for whom they should have shown the greatest concern. This betrayal led not only to morally reprehensible sexual abuse, but also in many cases it resulted in mental, emotional and spiritual abuse that scarred the victims for life. Nothing can be said in defense of the priests who violated their commitments as priests as well as the statutes of civil law in their immoral acts. Like all of us who sin, those priests who are guilty need and deserve our prayers. Many may well be in need of professional psychological counseling and therapy as well.

Those who are guilty of these horrific misdeeds are not bad priests doing bad things. They are, in most cases, good priests doing bad things, which makes the allegations all the sadder for the parishioners, brother priests and friends of the priests involved. It is important to remind ourselves that most of these offenses took place in the past, when the selection of candidates for the priesthood was not as strict as it is today. It is also important to put all of this in perspective. Of the nearly 50,000 priests in the United States, more than 98% serve faithfully each day without allegations of sexual misconduct against them.

As your Bishop, I wish to assure you that there are no priests serving anywhere in the Diocese of Lake Charles against whom credible or substantiated allegations of sexual misconduct with children have been made. Should I receive such allegations the priest would be removed from pastoral ministry immediately. Unless there are serious objections raised by the victim or the victim's family, the name of the accused priest will be turned over to the civil authorities immediately. Should the allegations prove true the priest would not be permitted to serve in the diocese ever again. I assure you that I will be vigilant in this matter.

I ask all of you to join with me in praying for all members of the Church in the United States that the Easter peace promised by the risen Lord Jesus Christ may be restored to us all.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton  
Bishop of Lake Charles

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## Day of Reflection for African-American Catholics slated

LAKE CHARLES — A Diocesan Day of Reflection for African-American Catholics in the Diocese of Lake Charles will be held Saturday, April 20, from 8:30 a.m. to noon in St. Louis Catholic High School located at 1620 Bank Street, according to Deacon Edward Lavine, head of the Office for Black Catholics.

Attendance at the Day of Reflection is required if a person is planning to attend Black Catholic Congress IX to be held Aug. 29-Sept 2, 2002 in

Chicago, Deacon Lavine said. The theme for Congress IX is "African American Black Catholic Leadership in the 20th Century: Solidarity in Action."

The Day of Reflection begins with registration at 8 a.m. and a prayer service and introduction is slated for 8:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. Two sessions, from 9:05 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. and 10:45 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. are on tap.

Groups will discuss the eight principles dealing with the problems confronting Black

Catholics included spirituality, parish life, youth and young adults, Catholic education, social justice, racism, Africa and HIV/AIDS.

Anyone interested in attending the Day of Reflection should contact the Office for Black Catholics, at 337-439-7436 during the hours of 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The goals of the National Black Catholic Congress is to strengthen the influence of the

Catholic church in neighborhoods throughout the community and to invite God's people to participate more fully in the prayer and work of the church.

Deacon Lavine expects, among others, to see parish leadership, evangelization (Follow Me) program participants and parish youth groups in attendance at the Day of Reflection.

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