



Diocesan Director responds to Plain Dealer columns

Recently, the Cleveland Plain Dealer newspaper ran two columns critical of the Diocese and Bishop Pilla in handling sexual abuse cases.

Donna Albertone, the Diocesan Director of the "Protecting God's Children" program responded with a letter-to-the-editor.

The newspaper published a portion of the letter, having edited nearly 2/3rds of the text. To understand the full context of Donna Albertone's message and in pursuit of the truth, here is the FULL text of her letter.

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Mr. Doug Clifton
Editor
The Plain Dealer
Plain Dealer Plaza
1801 Superior Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44114-2198

March 19, 2004

Dear Mr. Clifton,

VIA EMAIL

In response to two recent columns by Ms. Regina Brett concerning the child sex abuse scandal in the Church, I'd like to add one more chapter.

There is nothing you or I can do about someone with desire to have sex with children. You or I cannot prohibit that individual from acting out on that desire. The only thing you or I can do - the only thing every adult must do - is take away the opportunity for a child sexual abuser to offend.

We cannot undo the past. We cannot undo the physical and emotional hardship suffered by those affected by past incidents, but what we can do is focus on the future.

The Cleveland Catholic Diocese is training 40,000 + employees and volunteers to recognize the warning signs of a child sexual abuser, teaching them about controlling who has access to children, how to monitor programs and most importantly, how to communicate concerns.

Communicating a concern is not making an allegation. It is making someone else aware that there might be an inappropriate relationship with a child before it is too late.

Recently, there was a sign at my local recreation center advertising a sleep over for girls ages 8-12. At the bottom of the sign was a plea for chaperones. I inquired of a supervisor about the screening procedure for

chaperones. When I received nothing but a shrug I asked, “How will you know who these chaperones are and if they are safe?”

They won't. The sign should have read, “looking for access to girls ages 8-12? Just show up.”

My city doesn't have a protecting children program like the Cleveland Catholic Diocese. My school district doesn't have a program like the Cleveland Catholic Diocese. Most of those with the care, custody and control of children don't have a program like the Cleveland Catholic Diocese.

I was involved in the press conference of February 27th where members of the media gathered to hear Bishop Pilla discuss the findings of the US Catholic Bishops report on the child sexual abuse scandal. Part of that press conference was a 10 minute presentation discussing the Diocese's Protecting God's Children program. The members of the media were asked if they were aware that there are 10 warning signs of a child sexual abuser. Not one person inquired what they were.

Forget that these individuals were journalists and reporters looking for the story – aren't they parents, aunts, uncles, caregivers? And as a parent, aunt, uncle or caregiver wouldn't you want to know what the 10 warning signs of child sexual abuser?

Unfortunately, none of the news media chose to report the positive effort on the part of the Church to educate people about the devastating effects of child sexual abuse and the manipulative nature of perpetrators.

Are we doing this in response to the child sex abuse scandal in the Church? Yes.
But frankly, our nation didn't have an Office of Homeland Security prior to the events of September 11th. Today, I'm sure glad we do.

Taking what you learn and doing something with it is simply the right thing to do.

I can't do anything about an adult or priest who has the desire for sexual contact with children. I can't prohibit any adult from acting out on that desire.

I can and will do everything in my power to teach and train people to take away the opportunity for an offender to offend.

It is the only thing within our control.

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