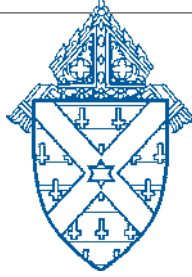


Arkansas Catholic



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The Diocese of Little Rock Weekly Newspaper



TARA LITTLE

Happy Birthday to you

Msgr. James E. O'Connell is serenaded Feb. 13 during the 50th anniversary dinner of the Greater Little Rock chapter of the Serra Club. Msgr. O'Connell, the former rector of St. John Seminary in Little Rock, will celebrate his 96th birthday Feb. 22. The priest was instrumental in establishing the chapter in 1954. Serra Club is a lay Catholic organization that promotes vocations.

A pastoral report to the people of the diocese

Bishop issues update on charter, study

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In June 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) adopted the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," a blueprint for responding to the problem of sexual abuse of children and young people by clergy and others acting in the name of the Church. Every diocese in the United States is committed to implementing the Charter and its various elements.

To provide independent verification of the bishops' implementation of the charter, the USCCB Office of Child and Youth Protection (also a product of the Charter) contracted with the Gavin Group, Inc., an independent auditing firm, to visit each diocese in 2003 and make a report regarding the diocese's compliance with the charter and its norms. The Diocese of Little Rock was audited in late August 2003. The national results were released on Jan. 6, 2004; that report included a national summary as well as the audit results for each individual diocese.

A second aspect of the bishops' commitment to address the sexual abuse of minors by those acting in the name of the Church was the provision that an independent study be conducted to determine the nature and scope of the problem. This study has been conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and the results will be released Feb. 27. Each diocese was asked to gather information for a 52-year period (1950-June 2002) regarding the number of allegations made against priests

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BRIEFS

Free heart fair set for Feb. 28 in Little Rock

St. Vincent Health System is hosting its annual Heart Fair Saturday, Feb. 28 at St. Vincent Infirmiry Medical Center in Little Rock. The free event includes medical information, CPR training, health screenings and music by Dave Miller and Bob Boyd Sounds. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Those interested in completing a health screening at the fair can download a form at www.stvincenthealth.com/heart or call (800) 632-4614.

Ash Wednesday funds support minority efforts

A collection will be taken up at all the Masses in the Diocese of Little Rock on Feb. 25, Ash Wednesday, to support the priests, religious and lay ministers serving in missionary apostolates among African-American, Asian, Hispanic and other Catholics in Arkansas.

Bishop J. Peter Sartain has committed 100 percent of the funds raised for direct ministry expenses. The first priority of the Ash Wednesday collection, he said, is to support existing missionary work.

The diocesan Ash Wednesday collection was started three years ago. Last year \$94,500 was collected through the parishes.

"Be reconciled to God" is the theme of this year's Ash Wednesday collection. As Catholics begin the 40-day season of Lent on Ash Wednesday with its emphasis on prayer, fasting and almsgiving, Kara Rago, director of stewardship and development, said, "This collection presents an opportunity to support those directly involved in the different missionary apostolates among our Catholic sisters and brothers in Christ in many parts of our diocese."

Additional donations may be made to the Ash Wednesday Collection, Diocese of Little Rock, 2500 North Tyler Street, Little Rock, AR 72207.

Knights of Columbus support diocesan offices

The state council of the Knights of Columbus recently presented donations to four diocesan offices and organizations. State deputy Lee Borne and state secretary Joe Lyons presented donations totaling \$4,500 to Bishop J. Peter Sartain. *Arkansas Catholic* was given a \$2,000 donation, the Vocations Office was given \$500, and \$1,000 donations were given to Diocesan Council of Women Religious and the Hispanic Ministry Office.



TARA LITTLE

Knights of Columbus state officers Lee Borne and Joe Lyons present \$4,500 in donations to Bishop J. Peter Sartain for four diocesan offices and organizations.

Charter

Continued from page 1

during that period, the number of victims, and the costs associated with such cases. The Diocese of Little Rock took part in the study and met all deadlines for the submission of information. The national report will be an aggregate report on all dioceses in the United States (not individual dioceses).

It is important to note that the Gavin Audit and the John Jay study, both conducted by entities which are not part of the USCCB, were nonetheless commissioned by the USCCB. The bishops of this country wish to do all we can to ensure that the sexual abuse of children and young people does not happen in the Church. The John Jay Study will be groundbreaking in a number of ways, including the fact that it has no counterpart in any other profession.

The Gavin Audit

We have been found to be in full compliance with the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

Essentially, the charter called for the development of diocesan policies for dealing with allegations of sexual abuse; the establishment of a Diocesan Review Board to advise the bishop on such allegations; the appointment of a victim assistance coordinator to offer the Church's pastoral care to victims; the establishment of safe environment programs to promote the protection of children and the education of adults who have charge of them; provision for criminal background checks for any Church personnel and volunteers involved in the care or supervision of children; and other matters related to the above. The Gavin Audit measured steps we have taken to comply with the charter from the period of June 2002, to the time of the audit itself (August 2003).

The following is a summary of the major efforts undertaken by the Diocese of Little Rock.

■ The Diocese of Little Rock has had a formal policy for responding to allegations of sexual abuse since 1992, and it was updated to fully conform to the charter in the summer of 2003.

■ The Diocese of Little Rock has had a lay board since 1992 to advise the bishop. Formerly called "The Pastoral Team," it is now called "The Diocesan Review Board" and is composed primarily of lay people not in the employ of the diocese. The current chair of the board is Ms. Julie Chavis, a Little Rock attorney.

■ I have appointed Dr. Carol Siemon, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist, as victim assistance coordinator.

■ The diocese has chosen "Virtus," a nationally acclaimed Safe Environment Program, for implementation in Arkansas. Training programs for group facilitators were held in October 2003, and 106 people are now certified as facilitators across the state. They have already begun conducting awareness sessions on providing safe environments for children in their local parishes and deaneries. To date, approximately 110 such sessions have been conducted, and 100 more are scheduled. Additionally, the priests of the diocese participated in one of two safe environment awareness sessions conducted in October specifically for them. In the Diocese of Little Rock, the many facets of "Virtus" are being coordinated by Mrs. Jan Brass.

■ The diocese is implementing a com-

prehensive program of criminal background checks for all clergy and seminarians as well as for all laypersons (employees and volunteers) who have supervision of children and young people. To date, more than 1,274 background checks have been conducted, and we anticipate conducting approximately 2,750 additional checks.

■ At the conclusion of our audit in August 2003, the Gavin Group auditors informed me that our diocese was in basic compliance with the charter and made two minor recommendations: first, that we provide contact information in all parishes regarding the availability of the diocesan victim assistance coordinator and publicize the procedures for filing a complaint of sexual abuse; and second, that we review the status of a former priest involved in a case of sexual abuse that took place before the establishment of the diocesan policy in 1992, and who left the active ministry years before the adoption of the charter. We promptly addressed both recommendations, and on Nov. 12, 2003, we were informed that we are in full compliance with the charter.

CHARTER UPDATE

PROTECTING CHILDREN & YOUTH

"Full compliance" does not mean that we have finished our work. Rather, it means that we have put in place the permanent mechanisms and processes that will enable us to do all in our power to protect our children and young people, to provide pastoral care to any victims and to safeguard the rights of all parties involved.

The John Jay Study

As mentioned above, the USCCB contracted with the John Jay College of Criminal Justice to conduct a comprehensive study of all dioceses in the United States to determine the nature and scope of the problem of the sexual abuse of minors. Each diocese was asked to check records for the period 1950-June 2002, to determine the number of allegations of the sexual abuse of minors by priests during that period; the number of alleged victims; the nature of such abuse; and the costs associated with it. Additionally, dioceses were asked to supply the number of priests who served in the diocese during the reporting period as well as demographic information.

In order to participate in the study, the Diocese of Little Rock reviewed the files of every priest who has served here since 1950 and included any information about past abuse that has been reported more recently to diocesan officials. The Diocese of Little Rock reported the following information to the John Jay College of Criminal Justice (numbers represent the designated reporting period of 1950-June 2002):

■ Approximately 540 priests had assignments in the Diocese of Little Rock during that time. This number includes diocesan priests of this diocese, diocesan priests of other dioceses who have served here, and priests of various religious orders who have served here.

■ Allegations of the sexual abuse of minors were made against 11 priests during the 52-year reporting period, or about 2 percent of the priests who were active in ministry during that time. [According to studies cited in the Virtus training materi-

als, approximately 2-3 percent of the adult male population in the United States has sexually abused minors.]

■ There were 18 victims associated with these allegations.

■ These allegations involve the sexual abuse of minors which took place from the 1950s to the 1980s. No allegations of current abuse had been presented to the diocese since the inception of our policy in 1992 through the reporting period of June 2002.

■ Most of the priests against whom allegations were made are deceased, and none of those still living is in active priestly ministry.

■ The Diocese of Little Rock has never entered into settlements or confidentiality agreements with victims, though it has provided pastoral and psychological care and support for them. For the 52-year period, the diocese spent approximately \$25,000 to provide this care and support.

Even one case of the sexual abuse of a child or young person is too many. Sexual abuse has long-lasting effects, and victims experience profound suffering. Once

again, I want to express my sincere apology and sorrow over any abuse that has taken place in Arkansas by clergy or others acting in the name of the Church, and my desire to do all I can to assist those who may have been victims of such abuse. I am grateful that my predecessor, Bishop Andrew J. McDonald, initiated efforts many years ago to protect our children and young people.

If you were a victim of sexual abuse as a minor by a member of the clergy or any person acting in the name of the Church in the Diocese of Little Rock, I invite you to contact our victim assistance coordinator, Dr. Carol Siemon; Msgr. J. Gaston Hebert, vicar general; or Msgr. Francis I. Malone, vicar general. They may be reached by calling (501) 664-0340.

I wish to say I am sorry to all of you who have been hurt, angered and embarrassed by this tragic scandal. And finally, I wish to reiterate my strong support for the priests who serve in the Diocese of Little Rock. Although nationally allegations of sexual abuse have been made against a variety of persons who work on behalf of the Church, particular attention has been focused on priests. It is important to affirm that they work tirelessly to provide spiritual and pastoral care to our people, whom they love and to whom they have committed their lives. They, too, have been offended and pained by the sins of some of our brothers.

It is my hope that the steps we are taking, both in our diocese and throughout the nation, will have a positive effect on every environment, not just the Catholic Church. May these efforts bear fruit far beyond the Church by educating the community at large about the societal problem of sexual abuse and the need to protect our children from those who would harm them.

Sincerely in Christ,

J. Peter Sartain

J. Peter Sartain
Bishop of Little Rock