



National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People

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March 2009

Cardinal Francis George, OMI, President
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Your Eminence:

As required by Article 10 of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, the National Review Board has reviewed the 2008 Annual Report of the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection and recommends its publication.

Last year I noted that nine dioceses and one eparchy had accepted our invitation to extend audits to selected parishes. This year the number nearly doubled to seventeen dioceses. We continue to believe this experiment has worked well and can provide bishops with important management information as they work to implement the *Charter*.

All non-compliances found by the auditors as of the end of the audit period (June 30, 2008) were corrected by the end of the year, except for the need to complete some additional safe environment training in one diocese. However, and most unfortunately, the number of dioceses and eparchies refusing to be audited increased from five to seven. Your Eminence is already well aware of the position taken on auditing by the Bishop of Lincoln, Nebraska; our concern about that does not need to be reiterated. However, this year the Bishop of Baker in Oregon also declined to be audited because he has declined to have safe environment training for children in the diocese. The Board and the USCCB Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People have spent much effort over the past two years supporting safe environment training by offering professionally developed suggestions for that work. We continue to believe that safe environment training is very important to protecting children. We hope the Conference will encourage open dialogue on any reservations bishops may have about this part of *Charter* implementation.

Since this is my last Annual Report as a member of the National Review Board, allow me to thank you and your predecessor, Bishop William Skylstad, for the privilege of serving. Your candor with the Board and willingness to collaborate with us have notably enhanced the Board's sense of satisfaction in serving and have promoted this model of lay collaboration in the work of the Church.

Very truly yours,

Michael R. Merz
Chair