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July 6, 2006

Feast of St. Maria Goretti

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Maria Goretti was a very young girl of twelve when she was sexually assaulted by an eighteen year old man. She resisted his attack, and he stabbed her several times. She died about 24 hours later. Devotion to her grew, and after several miracles were credited to her, she was canonized by Pope Pius XII in 1950.

We know that most of our children and young people live in an environment that is safe and loving. But we cannot deny that there are predators, like Maria Goretti's attacker, who live among us and who are a grave threat to our children and young people.

It is very fitting, then, that I promulgate our revised Diocesan Policy on Sexual Misconduct on this day, July 6, 2006, and place this Policy and its implementation under her patronage.

Our concern for the safety of children and young people, not to mention the vulnerable, may be and should be placed within the framework of the "themes of Catholic social teaching."

The first of these themes, given in the document called "Faithful Citizenship," is the "life and dignity of the human person." Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. The conviction that human life is sacred and that each person has inherent dignity is central to our teaching. The measure of every institution, including our Diocese and its parishes, as well as other entities, is whether or not it protects and enhances the life and dignity of the human person, including, of course, the persons of children and young people.

Another theme of our social teaching concerns rights and responsibilities. Children and young people, because their persons are holy and sacred, have a right to be protected from physical and sexual abuse, and they have a right to be taught, in an age-appropriate way, about how to recognize danger and safeguard themselves from harm. And we who exercise authority have a duty to respect and uphold these rights of minors.

A third theme is our option for the poor and vulnerable. Who, in a sense, is poorer and more vulnerable than children and young people? The younger,

the poorer; the younger, the more vulnerable, the younger, the more helpless; the younger, the more exposed to harmful activity by predators. But even those who are about to leave their status as minors, are very vulnerable to clever manipulators who prey on them for sexual gratification.

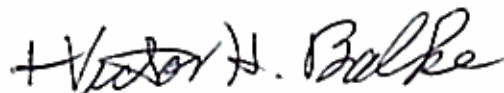
A fourth, and the final theme I will mention, is solidarity. John Paul II said in his encyclical on social concerns that "we are all really responsible for all." We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, and in a special way we are the keepers of our younger brothers and sisters. So it is in solidarity as a diocese that we must work to protect them from any kind of abuse, including sexual abuse.

These, then, are the main faith-based reasons why our Catholic Church, which has suffered because of some horrendously scandalous activity by some of our church personnel, is now taking a leadership role in protecting children and young people.

I pray that our fidelity to this revised policy on sexual misconduct by church personnel will lead to the utmost safety of our children and young people. At the same time, I pray that this policy will restore the faith and trust in the hearts of those people who have been affected, either directly or indirectly, by the scandalous activity of some in the past.

May the Lord sustain us all in our continuing efforts to make the Church a more and more credible and visible sign of God's Reign of Justice, Love and Peace.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victor H. Balke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "V" and "B".

+Victor H. Balke

Bishop of Crookston