For Immediate Release

A Letter to the Faithful in Western Washington

February 22, 2004

Next week, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops will release a report on the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy from 1950 to 2002. This study was initiated by the bishops so that all of us may better understand the scope of the crisis and its underlying causes.

I would again like to express my deep regret that any child or young person was ever harmed by a priest or by anyone serving on behalf of the church. These tragic incidents are contrary to the will of Christ who showed tender care for children, and I know my predecessors share my remorse.

You also may trust that healing for victims and the protection of our children are priorities in our Archdiocese. Programs and policies were put in place by my predecessors and I have continued to build on these policies to improve our pastoral care for victims. In addition I have implemented training and background checks for all employees that have proven extremely effective. I have appointed an Archdiocesan Review Board to review our policies periodically and to make recommendations relating to accused priests to determine if they should be removed from ministry. These and many other steps are necessary to ensure that every child in our care is safe.

At the same time, it would be a mistake to allow the very real problems of the past to diminish our appreciation for the vast majority of good priests serving in our diocese, or to obscure what the church has done and is currently doing to deal with the problem of sexual abuse of minors. In 1993, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops provided general guidelines to every diocese in the country. Here in the Archdiocese of Seattle our efforts date back to 1987.

As media reports based on the release of the national study surface next week, I ask that you inform yourselves about this issue by reading the Catholic Northwest Progress and visiting the archdiocesan website at www.seattlearch.org. In addition, I ask you to join me in prayer for the healing and reconciliation of those who were abused, mercy for those who committed these crimes and for God’s peace and grace on our church as we work to heal the wounds of the past and look to the future with hope.

With sincerest regards and wishes, I remain

Your servant in Christ,

Most Rev. Alex J. Brunett
Archbishop of Seattle