



*I Will Appoint Over You Shepherds After My Own Heart
A Pastoral Statement*

*Cardinal Roger M. Mahony
Archbishop of Los Angeles*

*Los Angeles, California
February 21, 2002*

This Pastoral Statement by Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, Archbishop of Los Angeles, was issued February 21, 2002.

I. Good Shepherds

God's promise to His people spoken by the prophet Jeremiah is powerful: "I will appoint over you shepherds after my own heart, who will shepherd you wisely and prudently" (Jeremiah 3:15). That prophecy reaches its greatest fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ who will define His own ministry in these words: "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

From the earliest days of Christianity, the image of Jesus as our Good Shepherd has been one of the most enduring. The very first artwork of Jesus found in the catacombs depict him as the loving, caring, nurturing, and protecting shepherd of the flock. That image of the Good Shepherd summarizes best the entire life and ministry of Jesus, and will serve as the model for all who will minister in his name in succeeding ages.

All who dedicate themselves to ordained, consecrated, and committed service to God's People in the Roman Catholic Church must define themselves and their ministry fully in the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd. All who continue to serve God's People in the name of the Good Shepherd - whether they be priests, religious or laity - are bound to imitate fully the example of Jesus Christ who was willing to lay down his life for the sheep. No lesser standard is acceptable for any of us in serving the people entrusted to our ministry by the Lord.

Jesus warned us that unless we fulfill the role of the good shepherd, we are nothing more than untrustworthy hired workers: "A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them" (John 10:12).

Throughout the centuries, the Lord has called countless men and women into the ministry and service of God's People. And thanks to God's grace, the vast majority have been good and faithful servants, and have lived out heroic lives of service after the model of the Good Shepherd - with many literally laying down their lives for the flock.

Fortunately, the vast majority of our priests, deacons, and lay ministers serve with zeal after the example of the Good Shepherd, and they minister to their people with distinction. I am grateful to them and proud of them.

Sadly, however, a small minority of priests, deacons, religious, and lay ministers have behaved more like the hired workers Jesus identifies. They have neither protected nor fed the flock with the care Jesus demands. In extreme cases, they have not only failed to protect the flock, they have acted as wolves inflicting grave harm upon some members of the flock.

Tragically, some who have ministered in the name of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles have preyed upon the most vulnerable members of the flock and have caused them incalculable harm. We are aware that sexual misconduct is a human reality occurring in families, schools, prisons, other settings, and even Churches. This fact makes it all the more crucial that the Church honestly confront the reality of abuse. We have striven, and will continue to strive, to assure that such reprehensible conduct, which is seriously sinful and totally in contradiction to Jesus' example and call, be prevented whenever possible and dealt with promptly and responsibly whenever it emerges.

The greatest treachery in the Church is for one who has committed his or her life to minister to God's People after the model of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, to use his or her spiritual position in the community to abuse or injure any member of that community. I condemn all such behavior without qualification. The most heinous betrayal among those ministering to the People of God is sexual misconduct, especially towards children. Such abuse is a grave evil and sin, and receives the harshest condemnation uttered by Jesus in the Gospels: "But anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones who have faith in me would be better drowned in the depths of the sea with a great millstone round his neck" (Matthew 18:6).

As the chief shepherd of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, I must ensure that the faithful are served by men and women who fully reflect the love, nurture, and protection of the Good Shepherd. I cannot and will not accept less.

II. Sexual Abuse by Those Serving the Archdiocese

I sincerely apologize to anyone who has suffered sexual misconduct or abuse by a priest, deacon, lay minister, employee, or volunteer of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Such conduct totally contradicts the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and seriously breaches trust between minister and people. There are no excuses for sexual abuse.

Apologies are vitally necessary, but of themselves are insufficient. My goal as chief shepherd is to do all that is humanly possible to prevent sexual abuse by anyone serving the Archdiocese. Accordingly, in 1988 the Archdiocese of Los Angeles promulgated written policies on Sexual Abuse by Clergy. We continue to revise those policies and procedures as necessary to ensure that the overall goal is attained:

It is the policy of the Archdiocese that sexual abuse by clergy is a most serious abuse of trust and will not be tolerated. The Archbishop has the responsibility to the People of God to appoint priests and deacons to positions of trust only if he is morally certain that they will be able to properly serve the people entrusted to their pastoral care.

The Archdiocesan procedures focus upon these objectives:

- Treat all allegations of sexual abuse seriously and never deal with a problem of sexual abuse on the part of a priest or deacon by simply moving him to another ministerial assignment;
- Educate clergy and people about the problem of sexual abuse and set in place screening procedures and educational policies on this subject for those training for the ordained ministry;
- Cooperate fully with civil reporting procedures governing sexual abuse.

There are parallel policies in place for Archdiocese/Parish schools, religious education programs, youth ministry, and detention ministry. These policies activate a process to deal immediately with allegations of sexual misconduct.

When we become aware of sexual misconduct, our first steps include attentive listening to the person who makes the complaint of abuse. Our immediate focus is to help the person directly harmed by the misconduct or abuse. Our assistance minister continues in contact with the person and provides appropriate counseling referrals. The sooner the healing process begins, the more effectively a shattered life can be restored.

At the same time, if a minor is involved, the requirements of the mandated reporting statutes are followed so that civil authorities may investigate the complaints. The individual accused is immediately removed from active ministry pending the results of the investigations. As to sexual misconduct charges involving adults, a thorough investigation is initiated by the Archdiocese and the individual is removed from active ministry if the circumstances warrant.

We must recognize that whenever abuse takes place there are many people victimized in a variety of ways who also need the Church's outreach: family members, parishioners, co-workers in the parish, teachers and staff in a parish school, fellow clergy, and the Church herself. A very real anger and rage emerges with the realization that one who serves the Archdiocese has victimized all of us through his or her betrayal of our trust.

The sexual abuse of minors is the most heinous of all. Children and youth depend upon adults to protect them and to form them. Clergy have a special obligation to assist parents by creating a Christian environment for their children. This obligation is shared with religious and lay ministers who work in collaboration with priests. Often, the children are entrusted to the parish and to the parish school for their ongoing formation and education. To violate those young people while they are in the care of the Church is the most despicable breach of trust.

Let me state very clearly: the Archdiocese of Los Angeles will not knowingly assign or retain a priest, deacon, religious, or lay person to serve in its parishes, schools, pastoral ministries, or any other assignment when such an individual is determined to have previously engaged in the sexual abuse of a minor. If the Archdiocese determines that a priest or deacon has engaged in such conduct, that person will be removed from all clerical offices and all pastoral or educational ministry and will not be reassigned. Since he will never return to active ministry, he will be encouraged to seek a dispensation from the obligations of the priesthood or the diaconate and to return to the lay state.

III. Efforts to Assure Trustworthy Ministry

I want to assure all the members of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles that comprehensive steps are being taken to make certain that those being ordained are men of personal integrity and that they will serve the Church as trustworthy ministers after the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

The application and screening process for those entering our seminaries is thorough and comprehensive. It includes psychological testing, as well as an in-depth interview process. The background screening includes the government fingerprinting process. Our policy is to be ever alert for future priests and deacons who have the talents and generosity to serve the Church with the holiness and trustworthiness expected of a good shepherd.

Throughout the formation process, regular programs are given dealing with human growth and development, human sexuality, and how to maintain appropriate boundaries in ministerial relationships. Professional psychologists and other experts help guide the formation journey. Formation also includes participation in supervised ministry in a variety of settings. Feedback from this monitored ministry is used to assess the suitability of a candidate for ministry. Many aspects are taken into consideration before anyone is proposed for ordination.

Two years prior to possible ordination, our seminarians spend a full ten months living in a rectory and working with the priests, parish staff, and parishioners. During this period of time, the priests and parish staff monitor and evaluate them for suitability to be a diocesan priest. Upon their return to the seminary, evaluation continues for two years before being approved for ordination.

The Seminary emphasizes daily prayer, spiritual direction, and participation in a support group to assist him to live out a life that is faithful to the life of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, and which will help ensure sound moral living.

Ordained priests and deacons are involved with ongoing formation and education programs designed to help them remain faithful to their commitments as clergy. The Archdiocese offers special programs to refresh the clergy on their obligations, to review acceptable boundary principles, and to keep them alert to their obligation to protect all in the Church - especially children and youth.

Teachers and staff in our schools and those employed in parishes to work with minors are fingerprinted and cleared by the appropriate law enforcement agency before beginning their work. They make an annual acknowledgement of their responsibility to report any reasonable suspicion of child abuse. Policies on appropriate conduct with the youth in their care are also in place.

Though no human plan can possibly foresee all eventualities, I can say without hesitation that extensive efforts are being taken by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to make certain that all who minister to God's People in this Archdiocese do so with personal integrity, trustworthiness, and zeal - all the qualities of the Good Shepherd.

IV. Our Good Shepherds

While there is a wide circle of victims involved in any instance of sexual misconduct or abuse, the clergy of the Archdiocese suffer in a unique way. When a brother priest or deacon violates the sacred trust of his ordination and harms any parishioner, especially a child or youth, he lowers a cloud of suspicion over all priests and deacons. They feel a sense of betrayal, disappointment, disillusion, and anger.

Here in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles we are truly blessed with priests and deacons who carry out their ministry with integrity and distinction. In fact, most clergy are working too hard. The continuing growth of the number of Catholics across the Archdiocese presents our priests and deacons with challenging pastoral demands.

The vast majority of our priests and deacons are dedicated ministers to our people, and I thank them and commend them for their commitment. We cannot allow the terrible evil of a few to tarnish the incalculable pastoral work and holiness of the majority.

I close with a quote from *As I Have Done for You* which expresses well the image of the Body of Christ, the Church, as intended by Jesus Christ and which is our goal here in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles:

We are at our roots when the People of God gather faithfully together at the Eucharist with their bishop and with his priests and deacons and other ministers. The Spirit evokes the apostolic Church not by bringing us into the past, but by wedding the past to the ongoing life and faith of this community, and by enlivening the charisms and enabling their full flourishing in a way that marked the early gatherings of the Church at prayer. (1)

Our future as a Church and as an Archdiocese is strong and vibrant. Being comprised of human beings with all of our weaknesses, the Church processes forward with its saints and sinners. Our constant efforts are to renew all things in Christ and to cooperate with God's grace in building up the Church in genuine holiness. This is our prayer and our hope:

The Church at this moment may be likened to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13 ff.). Like them, we continue to speak with one another about all that God has been doing in our midst. Like them, we are on the road, in via, amidst a journey, and, like them, many of our expectations have been unsettled. As our tightly held expectations are disturbed, the gift of the Lord's presence, the power of the Spirit, is ours to receive, and the Lord is in our midst, no less than on the road to Emmaus - as companion on the journey, as teacher, as guide and, especially, in the Blessing and Breaking of the Eucharistic Bread.(2)

May Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd, ever guide us on our journey as his disciples and co-laborers in his vineyard.

1 *As I Have Done For You, A Pastoral Letter on Ministry*, Holy Thursday, 2000, n. 75.

2 Op. cit., n. 76.