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Dear Brother Priests

You probably know of one or another priest who has been accused of sexual abuse, perhaps even yourself. The Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP) is aware of such situations among its members and beyond. Some have been accused but exonerated. Others have been accused and convicted. Many others have been accused but ill-defined and protracted civil and ecclesial investigations leave them hanging for months and years. Some are never convicted or exonerated. This maybe aggravated if he is an international brother priest, probably left for deportation often with no due process at all. The protocols, standards, procedures, and communications (or lack thereof) vary greatly from one bishop and chancery to another. While the AUSCP understands the serious need for church authority’s due diligence and timely and appropriate response to accusations, and we remain steadfast in our pastoral care for those who have been victimized, we are concerned that our accused brother priests usually find themselves in extreme bewilderment, isolation, and abandonment.

Our Association is not one of lawyers, counselors, or experts in ecclesiastical protocols. Part of our Association’s mission is to provide mutual support to our brother priests. Our members have years of pastoral service ministering to men and women--innocent & guilty, victimized & convicted, isolated & supported.

While acknowledging the responsibility of priests to assist their bishop in determining the truth of an accusation, there are some things an accused priest needs to do as an investigation begins. AUSCP wants to send the enclosed card to every priest in the U.S. Just as in civil proceedings the “accused” is immediately informed of their Miranda Rights, so too the Code of Canon Law protects legitimate rights of priests as articulated by Canon Law. An accused priest needs to slow his immediate reaction down and seek immediate counsel and support.

Equally important is pastoral support for accused priests needed from local brother priests. If you hear of a priest acquaintance who has been accused—contact him. You don’t have to “fix it” or “judge it,” just reaching into his isolation can make a big difference. On the other hand, if you are an accused priest, take the initiative and ask for support from your priest friends. Do not place yourself in immediate exile!

The few guidelines on the enclosed AUSCP wallet card can be of enormous help if you ever get such a call. The card has been prepared by AUSCP’s Mutual Support Committee with the help of seasoned canon lawyers. This group has 90 canon lawyers available and has helped countless accused or unjustly treated priests and deacons since 1997.

We encourage you to keep this card always at hand, best in your wallet, so if you get such a call you will know what to do. Additionally, we provide an e-mail address and phone number if you ever find yourself not knowing just what to do. In short, AUSCP exists to provide support as needed and/or requested.

In Christ

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