

Dear Friends of Father Michael Kelly,

Friday, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007

What I'm going to write is probably very self-evident to all of you, but I feel the need to spell things out, especially as we enter the season of Advent and the feasts of Our Lady. For me, too, the coming anniversary of my ordination makes me grateful not only for the gift of my ministry, of which I am unworthy, but also the gift of our Church.

Today, the Feast of Saint Andrew, reminds us all of our role in bringing others to Jesus.

Andrew did this by searching out his brother Simon (soon-to-be Peter), once he himself had come to know Jesus. "We have found the Messiah," he exclaimed, and so Simon met his Lord. We do the same in a million ways, but one essential element in bringing people to Jesus lies in defending the dignity of the Church which he established.

For this reason, I believe your efforts to support Fr. Michael are integrally connected to your effort to support the Church which he has served so tirelessly since 1973, when he began his ministry in our Diocese.

Since Andrew brought the disciple to Jesus who would become our first Holy Father, St. Peter, I also believe that our efforts should defend the honor and the dignity of our Bishops. I myself have at times lacked the proper perspective in failing to appreciate how difficult and sensitive is their position in regards to accusations that are made.

Meeting last week with Bishop Blaire, Monsignor Ryan, and several priests in charge of regional clusters of churches, I regretted having jumped to conclusions. In fact, as he explained, those entrusted with the leadership of our diocese are doing everything they can to respond to this accusation - and the threat of a lawsuit - on every level. As you know, they must also defend the right of anyone who believes their dignity has been violated to make their grievance public. Meanwhile, they must also defend the Church.

In the case of a priest accused for sexual improprieties, defending the Church may also involve removing him temporarily from ministry, or even sanctions against that priest if the case against him turns out to be substantiated. So our Bishops are in an extremely painful situation as they seek to work toward the resolution that will best serve justice.

This weekend, some very positive news should be coming out in the local newspapers.

It does not involve Fr. Michael, so far as I know, but it may have a positive impact on his case. Here is Bishop Blaire's press statement: "I wish to announce that the lawsuit brought against the Diocese and the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales claiming childhood sexual abuse by Father Murty Fahy, a deceased member of the Oblates, has been dismissed without prejudice. In response to the claim, the Diocese conducted a thorough investigation. This was made more difficult by the fact that Father Fahy is deceased and unable to defend himself. The investigation did not reveal any facts which suggested that Father Fahy acted improperly toward children. We know that the many people who knew and admired Father Fahy will find comfort in this news. I am most grateful to Father Fahy and the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales for their dedicated service to the people of our Diocese." *Bishop Stephen E. Blaire, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007.*

No doubt Father Fahy was interceding for this case from beyond the threshold of death.

For my part, I've decided that prayer is the most important and useful thing I can do.

Yes, the letters in support of Fr. Michael continue to be an important element in your response, but I now understand that the more effective activity on everyone's part might simply be more fervent prayer. If we dedicate ourselves to intense prayer, invoking the intercession of Mary, St. Michael, and all the spiritual assistance God has made

available, I believe that we will see miracles. And, while you're at it, please keep all of us who are earthen vessels in your prayers, that we might faithfully fulfill our mission.

God bless you all, and thank you so much for your efforts. *Fr. Dean McFalls, Lathrop*