

National Black Church Initiative

P.O. Box 65177

202-744-0184

dcbc2002@gmail.com

www.naltblackchurch.com

March 9, 2011
For Immediate Release

Contact:
Rev. Anthony Evans
202-744-0184

THE NATIONAL BLACK CHURCH INITIATIVE CONDEMNS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S CONTINUED ABUSE OF CHILDREN

*We Demand the Implementation of the Child Victim's Act in Every State to
Expose the Sexual Abuse of Catholic Priests and Other Predators*

Washington DC – The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI), a faith-based coalition of 34,000 churches comprised of 15 denominations and 15.7 million African Americans, is outraged at the recent grand jury finding in Philadelphia that 37 Catholic priests in active duty have credible allegations of sexual abuse. The Philadelphia archdiocese suspended 21 of the 37 Roman Catholic priests who were named as child molestation suspects on Tuesday, March 8, 2011.

NBCI says, “too little, too late.”

Two grand juries – one in 2005 identifying 63 active duty Catholic priests with allegations of sexual abuse and this finding in 2011 identifying 37 – have found the Catholic Church's response to child abuse within the church woefully inadequate. The panel created by the Catholic Church in 2005 was found to have worked mostly to protect the church, not the victims – an unsettling realization after consistent reassurances from the Catholic Church that they are protecting children. How many innocent lives have been forever tarnished? It seems that the Catholic Church only responds to public, legal intervention and is incapable of independently protecting children and identifying abusers.

The Child Victim's Act, which was authored by Delaware State Senator Karen Peterson, eliminated the civil statute of limitations for sexual abuse of children. It gives child victims of unspeakable sexual trauma the chance to speak up in a way that they were previously unable to. It is clear that sexual abuse, especially when perpetrated by a trusted religious authority, leaves an indelible mark on a child. These broken children must have the opportunity to address their abuser in whatever timeline facilitates positive mental and physical health for the victim – Catholic priests can no longer hide behind statutes of limitations. These children deserve justice now.

Rev. Anthony Evans, President of NBCI says, “Over the years we have expressed, in the strongest of terms, the position of the black church regarding the Catholic Church sexual abuse scandal. We have made it very clear – we condemn the perpetuation of sexual abuse. We condemn the Church’s lack of transparency. We no longer believe that the Catholic Church is utilizing the necessary resources to end the evil abuse of God’s children. Therefore, I have ordered our faith command leaders nationwide to advocate on the passage of the Child Victim’s Act in every state to ensure that Catholic and Protestant abusers are held accountable. Additionally, five years ago I asked our NBCI faith-based leaders to meet with their state attorney generals to implement effective reporting and investigative channels to identify and remove predators from positions within the Church. I am happy to report the success of this collaboration and I am calling on the Catholic Church to follow our lead.”

Leaving hundreds of thousands of victims in its wake worldwide, this scandal has cost over \$2.6 billion dollars, with physical and emotional costs impossible to calculate. Abusers continue their insidious molestation under the protection of the Catholic Church and very few ever are tried in a court of law – according to the John Jay College of Criminal Justice only 6% of all priests against whom allegations were made were convicted and about 2% received prison sentences since 1950. In fact, a 1997 letter from the Vatican warned Ireland's Catholic bishops not to report all suspected child-abuse cases to police illustrating that the Catholic Church enforced a worldwide culture of covering up crimes by pedophile priests. This can go on no longer - victims voices will be heard and with the power of the black church justice will be achieved.

Pope Benedict XVI has admitted that "the greatest persecution of the church doesn't come from enemies on the outside but is born from the sin within the church." NBCI agrees that there is sin within the Catholic Church however; the Catholic Church is not being ‘persecuted’. Rather, it is the innocent children, in their quest to strengthen their faith, who are persecuted by Catholic clergy. We are simply asking that the Church take full responsibility for the lives irrevocably damaged.

After nearly 60 years of abuse allegations and indictments it has become clear that the Catholic Church is a moral threat to the Christian faith. Each child whose innocence is stolen represents a crack in the Catholic Church’s credibility – it is now very clear the Catholic Church is shattered. We are dismayed that the damage the Catholic Church inflicts upon children weakens the global message of Christ. The Catholic Church abuse scandal has not only affected Catholics worldwide, but Protestants as well. The numbers are staggering and shake the very foundation of the Christian Church. This is why we are issuing this statement – the numbers speak for themselves.

An extensive new survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life finds that the number of people who say they are unaffiliated with any particular faith today (16.1%) is more than double the number who say they were not affiliated with any particular religion as children. Among Americans ages 18-29, one-in-four say they are not currently affiliated with any particular religion.

While those Americans who are unaffiliated with any particular religion have seen the greatest growth in numbers as a result of changes in affiliation, Catholicism has experienced the greatest net losses as a result of affiliation changes. While nearly one-in-three Americans (31%) were raised in the Catholic faith, today fewer than one-in-four (24%) describe themselves as Catholic.

The Catholic Church does not bear the full responsibility for the growing loss of religious affiliation or belief; however one can argue that the recent scandals have diminished faith and contributed to the falling numbers of those who identify themselves as Catholics or as believers.

Of all the major racial and ethnic groups in the United States, black Americans are the most likely to report a formal religious affiliation. Even among those blacks who are unaffiliated, three-in-four belong to the "religious unaffiliated" category (that is, they say that religion is either somewhat or very important in their lives), compared with slightly more than one-third of the unaffiliated population overall. Our faith is strong.

The black church will not bend – abuse perpetrated Catholic priests, or any religious authority, goes against the foundation of the Christian faith. It is imperative that the black church, with a historically solid position as a guardian of justice and peace, stand to protect our children. For Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. (King James Bible, Matthew 19:14)

About NBCI

The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI) is a coalition of 34,000 African American and Latino churches working to eradicate racial disparities in healthcare, technology, education, housing, and the environment. NBCI's mission is to provide critical wellness information to all of its members, congregants, churches and the public. The National Black Church Initiative's methodology is utilizing faith and sound health science. The National Black Church Initiative's purpose is to partner with major organizations and officials whose main mission is to reduce racial disparities in the variety of areas cited above. NBCI offers faith-based, out-of-the-box and cutting edge solutions to stubborn economic and social issues. NBCI's programs are governed by credible statistical analysis, science based strategies and techniques, and methods that work.

Visit our website at www.naltblackchurch.com.

###