



DIocese OF FRESNO
CHANCERY OFFICE
1550 NORTH FRESNO STREET
FRESNO, CALIFORNIA 93703-3711
TELEPHONE (559) 488-7400

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Addressing the Suffering Inflicted by Clergy Abuse
An Open Letter to the Faithful from The Most Rev. Joseph V. Brennan

Brothers and Sisters,

The Catholic Church has made great progress in protecting the young and vulnerable and creating a safe environment for all, but it is still on its journey of dealing with the issue and atoning for the sin of clergy sexual abuse. Our pledge to protect our youth is an ongoing effort that will continue to be a top priority for me and our Diocese. Victims of abuse endure a lifetime of pain, and we as Catholics must commit to a lifetime of atonement.

A recent development in the journey, of which you are most likely aware, is the California State law which opened a three-year window for individuals to bring forward otherwise barred or expired claims for sexual abuse suffered as a child. Since the closing of the filing window on December 31, 2022, we have been informed of 154 cases filed against our Diocese. The reopening of the window has made every Diocese in California susceptible to more claims. What we are facing gives us the opportunity to redouble our efforts in creating a safe environment for everyone in and out of the church and address real issues in atoning for the sin of clergy abuse against children.

I have been discerning as to how our Diocese will continue to atone for the sin of clergy abuse and as I discern further, I want to share with you two definitive goals:

- To make sure we are handling claims of abuse with equitable compassion and resolving those claims as fairly as possible.
- To ensure the continuation of ministry within our Diocese.

Throughout the past months I have been working with our College of Consultors, the Diocesan Finance Council, my own staff and professionals retained by the Diocese to consider all options available to us. After much consultation and careful thought, I have decided that the Diocese will file a petition for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy with the United States Bankruptcy Court in 2024. I expect to file that petition in August.

Filing for Chapter 11 will allow us to address the substantial number of claims brought forth by victims collectively, and it will allow us to address those claims honestly, compassionately and equitably.

Requesting a court-supervised reorganization is the only path that allows us to meet the goals stated above. The reorganization ensures all victims are compensated fairly and funds are not depleted by the first few cases addressed. The process also allows the operations of our schools, parishes and organizations to continue uninterrupted, since the only entity filing for bankruptcy protection is the corporate sole, known legally as *The Roman Catholic Bishop of Fresno*. Catholic Charities and *The Fresno Diocese Education Corporation*, which operates the schools are separate legal or ecclesial entities and will not be filing for bankruptcy protection.

The reality of filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy will surely raise some questions from the faithful. Our Office of Communications has established a list of [frequently asked questions for your reference](#). There is still much we do not know, but I am committing to you the faithful, to provide you with more information as we move forward.

When I hear how many lives were affected by clergy sexual abuse, my heart truly breaks. I imagine many of you are dismayed by the news of our serious financial situation, but I ask you to let go of your distress and turn your hearts towards the victims of abuse.

In Christ,

The Most Reverend Joseph V. Brennan
Bishop of the Diocese of Fresno