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**Opening statement by The Most Reverend Kevin W. Vann,
Bishop of Fort Worth, concerning the July 25, 2006 Order of
Tarrant County District Court Judge Len Wade**

Good morning,

When I arrived here in the Diocese of Fort Worth a year ago I inherited a vibrant and dynamic local Church, a dedicated group of priests, deacons, and religious, as well as faithful parishioners. I have also encountered other people's pain and suffering from sexual abuse that has yet to heal. That pain was endured by young Catholics years ago and exacerbated through past decisions within our Church.

I wish to begin by offering my personal and heartfelt apology to those who have suffered abuse by members of the clergy. It is a sin — and a crime. In fact, such abuse is doubly painful for those of you who have suffered it. For it not only took your innocence and your childhood; in some cases it destroyed your Faith. Thus our entire Church has lived with this sadness — the victim-survivors, our faithful priests, and our loyal parishioners alike — who desire and pray that this terrible pain be replaced by healing and reconciliation.

Today marks a turning point toward that healing and reconciliation.

In response to the scope of the sexual abuse issue, in June of 2002, just a few miles from here, the Catholic Bishops of the United States put their names onto an unprecedented and historic document. It is the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which was reviewed and refined by the Holy See.

The Charter committed Bishops to the following:

- Zero tolerance of any sexual abuse of minors;
- The removal from ministry of a priest or deacon when even a single act of abuse of a minor has been established;
- Stringent reporting procedures to church and civil authorities following allegations of abuse;
- Openness and transparency in the Church's response;
- A strong sexual abuse prevention program to reduce the likelihood of such abuses occurring in the future.

We in the Diocese of Fort Worth have been found to be in full compliance with the Charter through three independent audits conducted by the Gavin Group.

Our Diocese implemented Called to Protect, a comprehensive state-of-the-art sexual abuse prevention program that applies to children, youth, clergy, employees and volunteers who serve in the Diocese.

What our Church has learned is that we must be ever vigilant and each and every one of us must truly live our Faith.

Which brings me to my decision that I am announcing today.

Several weeks ago, Judge Len Wade of the Tarrant County District Court, after carefully reviewing the personnel records of the seven priests accused of sexual abuse of minors, ordered that portions of those personnel records be released to the public. Intervenors in the case — the *Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* — had requested those records be released. The Diocese had raised at the outset concerns about the protection of the rights of all the parties involved. On July 25th, Judge Len Wade sufficiently answered those concerns.

I am announcing today that the Diocese will not appeal the judge's decision to release portions of the priests' personnel records to the public.

In reading through these records it is evident to me that as a Church — now operating under the Charter's stringent requirements — we could have acted more promptly, forthrightly, and with greater compassion to those who came forward with allegations. In that review it also became clear to me that any ambiguity with regard to the status of these seven priests must be resolved. That is why in one of these cases, that of Philip Magaldi, I am further announcing today that I have revoked all of his priestly faculties.

As some matters are still pending in the courts, I am prevented from commenting specifically on any of these cases or on the specific details inside these seven priests' personnel files. However, it is my fervent hope that my decision not to appeal the Court's ruling will mark a turning point for the Diocese of Fort Worth and for our community at large.

Now, I want to say a few words to our priests here in this Diocese. You have been truly faithful to your vows and extraordinarily dedicated in your devotion to your mission. Cases such as these seven do not reflect in any way on your strength of character or your faithful exercise of priestly ministry.

Also, to Catholics throughout the Diocese, I wish to express my appreciation for your faithfulness and loyalty throughout these years. I share with you the desire for justice for those who have suffered and the desire for healing and reconciliation for us all.

Finally, I again ask that anyone who has either witnessed or has suffered sexual abuse by anyone who serves the Church to come forward so that we can continue the healing process.

Now I would be pleased to take your questions.