

Diocese of Jackson

STATEMENT REGARDING SNAP'S PAID CLARION LEDGER ADVERTISEMENT PUBLISHED ON MAY 25, 2003

Since January 1, 1994, the Diocese of Jackson has had its current policy in place that requires investigating current and past allegations of sexual misconduct by priests and religious. Sexual misconduct by church personnel violates human dignity and the mission of the Church. The Diocese of Jackson is committed to ensuring that children being served by the Church are not at risk of sexual abuse by Church personnel. The spiritual well-being of all victims, their families, and others in the community is of particular concern to the Church.

Members of SNAP have sued the Diocese of Jackson, its Bishop and local parishes seeking millions of dollars in damages. Bishop Latino acknowledges the letter addressed to him in the Sunday edition of the Clarion Ledger. The letter demands that the Diocese surrender some, if not all, of its defenses to the lawsuits. Among other things, the plaintiffs have demanded the disclosure of the names of wrongfully accused priests, of victims who have requested anonymity, and of information protected from disclosure like the priest/penitent privilege. The Diocese has defended its First Amendment rights by availing itself of constitutional and statutory defenses. An appeal to the Mississippi Supreme Court has been granted. The legal defenses at issue in the Morrison case will be decided by the court and not by the members of SNAP.

SNAP and its members have twisted the facts in a light most favorable to their "quest for truth." For instance, the advertisement states that 22 priests were accused of abusing children. **However, the statement fails to inform the public that the list includes events over a 60 year period, that all accused were not priests, that some were wrongfully accused, that others are religious, that some are deceased, that others have left the priesthood or are no longer in active ministry within the Diocese of Jackson.**

In accordance with diocesan policy, all victims of abuse are offered counseling and pastoral care. Currently, the Diocese of Jackson is in the process of implementing the procedures and guidelines adopted by the bishops of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops more commonly known as the "Dallas Charter and Norms." The Charter and Norms are designed to ensure the protection of children from sexual misconduct by lay employees as well as priests and religious.