

COMMENTS, 5.24.06

The Honorable Richard Dana

My name is Dick Dana. I'm a former Chief District Judge and cofounder of the Judicial Arbiters Group here in Colorado. I'm not a Catholic, so I was surprised and pleased when Archbishop Chaput approached our firm to try to mediate the abuse claims currently facing the local Church.

JAG is one of the oldest private judicial services in the United States. JAG exists for one purpose: the fair, effective mediation of disputes. Litigation is time consuming. It can also be ugly, adversarial and enormously expensive -- and in the end, it can still fail to do justice.

The archbishop said a few moments ago that he had set aside a substantial financial sum to resolve the cases currently facing the archdiocese. He did not name the size of the financial sum. Neither will I. There are two reasons for this.

First, as a former judge and experienced mediator, I *do* know the amount of the resources set aside here in Denver, and I believe they're adequate to address victims' concerns. The funds have been placed fully at the disposal of our panel. No archdiocesan staff and no archdiocesan attorney will determine our panel's work.

Second, our panel will focus on helping victims heal. That demands serious financial resources. We've been given those resources. Those resources will be applied according to each individual victim's real needs.

Serving with me on the mediation panel will be former Denver Deputy Police Chief Heather Coogan, now Chief of Security for the Auraria Higher Education Campus in Denver. Chief Coogan could not be present today for this announcement. But I'm happy to present the third member of our panel, Mr. Jack Dahlberg. Mr. Dahlberg is a certified rehabilitation specialist. Jack has worked for nearly 30 years to help others overcome severe life and health traumas. Incidentally, Chief Coogan is a Catholic. Mr. Dahlberg is not.

The materials in your press packets will outline in greater detail how the mediation process will work. For the purposes of this mediation only, the Archbishop has asked our panel to not consider the Church's statute of limitation defense. Beginning today and for the next three months, any current litigant who wishes to explore mediation should contact my office. Any litigant is welcome to present his or her case to the mediation panel. Panelists will then examine the details of each claim and offer a resolution no later than October. Litigants are welcome to bring their attorneys when they meet with the panel, but as observers only. No attorney from either side will play an active part in the mediation.

The mediation panel will conclude its proceedings no later than five months from tomorrow. Again, any interested litigant must contact our panel within the next 90 days. This process applies only to those persons currently suing the Archdiocese of Denver. It neither precludes nor guarantees that any similar effort will be made in the future to any other group.

This announcement today is simply what it is, no more and no less: an honest effort to reach beyond the language of litigation to help people heal.