



Call to Action-Río Grande Valley

P.O. Box 3443, McAllen, Texas 78502

January 22, 2007

Mr. Bill Elliot
Chair, Board of Directors, RGV Educational Broadcasting, Inc.
c/o KMBH
PO Box 2147
Harlingen, TX 78551

Dear Mr. Elliot,

As you are undoubtedly aware, on Tuesday, January 16, 2007, at 9:00 pm, KMBH-TV did not air the PBS Frontline documentary, *The Hand of God*. This program, a ninety minute film, had appeared in all the local TV guides (which are prepared for publication well in advance and reflect the local programming schedule, not a generic national one) and also appeared in the schedule on the website of KMBH. This acclaimed film by Joe Cultrera (reviews are available from several internet sources) “tells the very personal story of how the [clergy sex abuse] crisis affected his own family in Salem, MA. It is the intimate story of how his brother, Paul, was molested in the 1960s by Father Joseph Birmingham, who also reportedly abused nearly 100 other children” (from the PBS Frontline website).

Members of the viewing public who called the station on Tuesday evening, when it became clear that an earlier edition of PBS Frontline was being aired instead of *The Hand of God*, were told by a staff person at the station that the General Manager (Monsignor Pedro Briseño) said that he needed to review the show for content and had ordered a substitute show to be broadcast instead. The following day, members of the viewing public who called the station were told by a staff person at the station that the documentary was not shown because the show was not available. Inquiries to PBS Frontline led to the information that there was an advance feed to the station on January 11, 2007, and that the live feed for broadcast was provided to KMBH and all other affiliates at 9:00 pm on January 16, 2007, with no technical difficulties. After an article in the *Valley Morning Star*, Monsignor Briseño distributed a press release which he described as answers to several questions put to him by a reporter from the *Valley Morning Star* and an explanation for the station’s decision not to air the show. I do not find, in the Monsignor’s press release, answers to the reporter’s questions, nor do I find an explanation for the failure to broadcast the PBS Frontline documentary. The statement that the program guide mailed to subscribers contained an earlier version of the PBS schedule is undoubtedly true, but is not responsive to the question, why was *The Hand of God* not aired—what was ultimately shown was not in the subscribers’ program guide, either.

This controversy raises several issues and the one of particular interest to Call to Action-Rio Grande Valley (CTA-RGV) is its connection to the clergy sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. One of CTA-RGV's major concerns is securing a full, open, and just resolution of this scandal. It is disturbing to us that this action by the management of KMBH-TV perpetuates the public perception that the Church is continuing to cover up this scandal and wants to suppress public disclosure and discussion.

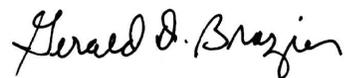
Other, more general issues concern censorship and conflict of interest. I am well aware that each PBS affiliate has the right to decide what is broadcast by its station. However, it is difficult for me to accept an argument that the award winning investigative reportage of PBS Frontline is inappropriate for broadcast in the Rio Grande Valley. Monsignor Briseño has not made that argument publicly, but given his non-responsive response, it seems to be what is lurking behind his decision not to air the show. KMBH, though owned by the Diocese, holds its FCC license as a public trust and as an affiliate of public broadcasting is held to an even higher standard in avoiding conflicts of interest.

I am requesting that you and your fellow board members do the following:

- Direct the management of KMBH-TV to broadcast the documentary film, *The Hand of God*, as soon as possible at a convenient viewing hour and that the showing be well advertised; and
- Direct the management of KMBH-TV to make a statement to the public to the effect that they regret that, through an error in judgment, the show was not aired at its original, advertised time.

Doing these two things would probably diffuse this issue in the local and national press and ease the concerns that some of the public have about censorship and conflict of interest.

Sincerely,



Gerald D. Brazier
President, Call to Action-Rio Grande Valley
(956) 212-5854

c/ Bishop Raymundo Peña
Monsignor Pedro Briseño