



# Efforts to create a safe environment have not waned

*An Update from the Diocese of Rochester | November 2015*

In September 2015, an independent auditing firm, StoneBridge Business Partners, found the Diocese of Rochester fully in compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, a comprehensive set of procedures established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2002 to address allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. StoneBridge was approved by the Bishops' Conference to conduct audits of arch/dioceses in the United States.

The Diocese of Rochester has been found in compliance in annual audits since the first audit was conducted in 2003.

This most recent audit provides another opportunity to review the measures taken by the Bishops of the United States and our own Diocese of Rochester in the years that have followed the extensive media attention and public discussion of the clerical sexual abuse scandal in the early 2000s.

## ***Charter set the course***

Firstly, the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* with the companion document, *Essential Norms*, was the catalyst for the many efforts that followed both nationally and locally. The *Charter* established strict procedures and requirements for treating complaints concerning the sexual abuse of minors and included requirements that arch/dioceses implement programs and procedures for pastoral care of victims; prohibit confidentiality agreements; be required to report allegations to civil authorities; establish codes of conduct for clerics, employees and volunteers; engage in open and transparent communications concerning allegations and procedures; train adults in sexual abuse awareness and prevention and teach children to recognize threatening behavior and to report

*In the most recent audit, the Diocese of Rochester was commended for recent modifications to its Creating a Safe Environment (CASE) program, including:*

**Requiring** all parishes to have a program coordinator to ensure training and background checks are being conducted;

**Creating** a badge system to ensure all CYO coaches have received safe-environment training;

**Establishing** a formal parish audit program encapsulating CASE program attributes;

**Requiring** training be updated every three years in sync with background evaluations;

**Offering** online training along with live-instructor training; updating *Codes of Conduct* and safe-environment policies; and

**Adding** additional staff at the Pastoral Center to assist with CASE initiatives.

it; conduct background checks of clerics, employees and volunteers; and prohibit transfers of clergy found to have credible allegations against them, among other protocols.

The bishops, then, also publicly pledged to adhere to a *zero-tolerance* policy and promised to take all necessary steps to ensure our Church would be a safe and sacred place for all people, especially children, teen-agers and vulnerable adults.

### ***Guiding principles***

Similarly, the Diocese of Rochester has initiated a number of policies and procedures through the years, some of which date back to the early 1990s.

In all our efforts, we are guided by and strictly adhere to the following principles:

- To respond promptly to all allegations of sexual abuse of minors where there is reasonable belief that abuse has occurred;
- To reach out to the victims and their families, and communicate sincere commitment to their spiritual and emotional well-being, as well as offer no-cost psychological counseling, opportunities to speak with diocesan leadership, including the Bishop of Rochester, and to take part in spiritual programs to aid healing and reconciliation;
- To remove ministerial privileges from the alleged offender promptly and refer him for appropriate medical evaluation and intervention if such an allegation is supported by sufficient evidence;
- To comply with the obligations of civil law by reporting an incident and cooperating with any official investigation; and
- To use open and transparent communications with members of the community, within the confines of respect for privacy of the individuals involved.

In 1993, we established a Diocesan Review Board to offer guidance in responding to allegations. The Review Board, whose members represent many areas of expertise, regularly meets to this day and helps us immeasurably in the process of policy development, assessment of sexual-abuse complaints, and the development of services for victims.

At that same time, we appointed Victims' Assistance Coordinators who receive complaints and organize assistance that might be helpful for victims. We formed and instituted policies concerning sexual abuse and harassment, and provided training to all clerics and employees in these areas. We have reported contemporary allegations of abuse to the appropriate civil authorities, with the result that diocesan priests, in some instances, were arrested, tried and convicted, and canonical proceedings, including laicization, have been initiated.

Following the promulgation of the *Charter* by the USCCB in 2002, the Diocese of Rochester:

- Enhanced our Review Board, particularly with the addition of individuals with extensive law-enforcement experience;
- Reached out to strengthen our relationships with law-enforcement officials throughout the 12-county Diocese;
- Reviewed our past responses in individual cases and, when appropriate, removed offenders from public ministry;

- Strengthened the screening process for men applying as candidates for ordination as priests and deacons;
- Instituted a program of background checks, including criminal history for clerics, educators, employees and volunteers who would work with children and vulnerable adults;
- Developed *Codes of Conduct* and educated clerics, educators, employees and volunteers concerning their applicability in specific settings. Those codes can be reviewed online at [www.dor.org](http://www.dor.org);
- Publicized contact information for our victims' assistance coordinator and offered training to all clerics, educators, employees and volunteers on the process of reporting allegations; and
- Encouraged victims to report to civil authorities and to seek assistance. In addition, we have continued to report contemporary and past allegations to appropriate civil authorities.

Since 2002, we have conducted background checks and provided training for more than 25,000 clerics, educators, employees and volunteers through the *Creating a Safe Environment* program.

In 2010, we launched a program to re-train all who work for the Diocese, in parishes, schools and in our affiliated agencies.

In 2015, we began a new *Creating a Safe Environment* newsletter for our employees and volunteers as a means to communicate safety information and maintain awareness.

### ***“Continue to work unceasingly”***

To this day, the issue of the sexual abuse of minors by any person working in the Church remains in the public eye, most recently in the new major motion picture *Spotlight*. The film focuses upon the *Boston Globe* articles in the early 2000s that made the clerical abuse scandal an international issue.

Yet, while attention to the issue has been and is still very painful for all, it also serves to remind us to remain ever vigilant and to do whatever is necessary to make the Church a safe and sacred place for all.

“The issue of sexual abuse of children by clergy and others in our Church has caused much pain, alienation from the Church, hardship and understandable anger,” Bishop of Rochester Salvatore R. Matano has stated publicly. “I join with our Holy Father, Pope Francis, and my brother bishops throughout the world in expressing deep sorrow for this tragedy. As the Shepherd of this Diocese, I will continue to work unceasingly to ensure that our parishes, schools and every entity connected to our Diocese are safe and holy environments for all.”

“It is my fervent prayer,” Bishop Matano continued, “that any person who has been harmed by a person in a position of trust and authority within our Church will find the spiritual and emotional healing they deserve. To that end, I encourage those who were victimized to please contact our victims' advocacy office where, I know, you will be received as a son or daughter of God.”

#### **HELP FOR VICTIMS**

Victims of abuse should always report to the civil authorities. To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, victims are encouraged to contact the victims' assistance coordinator, Mrs. Deborah Housel, at (585) 328-3228, ext. 1555; toll-free 1-800-388-7177, ext. 1555; or by e-mail to [dhouse1@dor.org](mailto:dhouse1@dor.org)