

May 18, 2011

Statement of Bishop Matthew H. Clark on the John Jay Study

“I am grateful for the release of the John Jay College study on the causes and contexts of sexual abuse by clerics in the Catholic Church. We can learn much from this extensive research.

One key finding of the study indicates that the best way to protect children from abuse is to be ever vigilant, to educate and to create safe environments where appropriate boundaries between adults and children are monitored and maintained. This commitment to prevention and to establishing firm codes of conduct and oversight has guided our own initiatives in the Diocese of Rochester.

We remain committed not only to preventing abuse within the church and in every corner of our diocese, but in helping wherever we can to share our knowledge and experience in the secular communities of which we are a part. We remain committed to zero tolerance for abusers, for even one case of sexual abuse of a child by a cleric would be one too many. The clerical abuse scandal is indeed a terrible tragedy, but we have and must learn from it. We must share our knowledge with others to combat this societal issue, and work tirelessly to be advocates and protectors of our children.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT DIOCESAN EFFORTS

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester has adopted key principles and initiated a number of steps to ensure all people, especially children and youth, are protected in church-related environments.

OUR PRINCIPLES:

- Respond promptly to all allegations of abuse where there is reasonable belief that abuse has occurred.
- If such an allegation is supported by sufficient evidence, remove ministerial privileges from the alleged offender promptly and refer him for appropriate medical evaluation and intervention.
- Comply with the obligations of civil law for reporting an incident and cooperating with any official investigation.
- Reach out to the victims and their families, and communicate sincere commitment to their spiritual and emotional well-being.
- Within the confines of respect for privacy of the individuals involved, deal as openly as possible with the members of the community.

OUR INITIATIVES

To follow these important principles, the Diocese of Rochester:

- Established a Diocesan Review Board of medical and law enforcement experts to offer guidance in responding to allegations.
- Appointed a Victims' Assistance Coordinator who, since 1993, has received complaints and organized assistance that might be helpful for victims.
- Instituted policies concerning prevention of sexual abuse and harassment, and provided training to all clerics, employees and volunteers in these areas.
- Reported contemporary allegations of abuse to the appropriate civil authorities, with the result in some instances that diocesan priests were arrested, tried and convicted.
- Worked to develop open, working relationships with current law enforcement officials throughout the 12-county diocese.
- Reviewed our past responses in individual cases and, when appropriate, removed offenders from public ministry.
- Strengthened our screening process for applicants seeking admission to the seminary or deacon formation program.
- Began a program of background checks, including criminal history for clerics, educators, employees and volunteers who would work with children and vulnerable adults. Since 2002, we have conducted background checks and provided training for more than 25,000 clerics, educators, employees, volunteers, as well as thousands of young people in our schools or religious-education programs, through our Creating a Safe Environment program and a new re-training initiative called Safe and Sacred.
- Developed Codes of Conduct, and educated clerics, educators, employees and volunteers concerning their applicability in specific settings. These codes can be reviewed online at www.dor.org.
- Publicized contact information for our victims' assistance coordinator and required training of all educators, employees and volunteers on the process of reporting allegations.
- Encouraged any victim of abuse or parents to report to law-enforcement authorities and to seek assistance. In addition, we have continued to report contemporary and past allegations to appropriate civil authorities.

News Editors and Producers, please include the following information for readers and viewers in your any news stories:

<p>HELP FOR VICTIMS: The Diocese of Rochester encourages victims of abuse to always report to the civil authorities. To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Diocese of Rochester, victims are encouraged to contact Barbara Pedeville, the victims' assistance coordinator appointed by Bishop Matthew H. Clark: Phone 585-328-3228, ext. 1215 (toll-free 1-800-388- 7177, ext. 1215), or by e-mail to pedeville@dor.org</p>
