



## **CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

Under the leadership of The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano, Bishop of Rochester, the Diocese of Rochester pledges to continue to work unceasingly to ensure that our parishes, schools and every entity connected to our diocese are safe and holy environments for all. To that end, this document is intended to be a help and resource to all.

#### **What has the diocese done to protect children and young people and create a safe environment for all?**

The Diocese of Rochester's initiatives to create a safe environment began decades ago.

In 1993, the Diocese established an independent Diocesan Review Board to offer guidance in responding to allegations. The Review Board, which includes lay professionals with expertise in law enforcement, mental health services and legal advocacy, assesses allegations and advises the Bishop. At that same time, the Diocese also appointed a Victim Assistance Coordinator who receives complaints and coordinates professional assistance for victims; initiates and implements policies to prevent sexual abuse and harassment; and regularly provides training to all clerics and employees within the Diocese.

The Diocese promptly reports all allegations of abuse to the appropriate civil authorities, with the result that, in some instances, diocesan priests were arrested, tried and convicted. In addition, the Diocese has undertaken canonical proceedings, including laicization of offending clerics, which means he is permanently removed from the priesthood.

Following the promulgation of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2002, the Diocese of Rochester:

*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.*

*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.*

*~ Bishop Salvatore R. Matano*

- Enhanced its Review Board, which assesses allegations and advises the Bishop of Rochester, particularly with the addition of lay professionals with extensive experience in law enforcement, the provision of mental health services and legal advocacy
- Strengthened its relationships with law enforcement officials throughout the 12-county Diocese
- Reviewed its 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 permanent deacons
- Instituted 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.
- Publicized contact information for the Victim Assistance Coordinator and offered to all clerics, educators, employees and volunteers training on the process of reporting allegations
- Encouraged victims to report to civil authorities and to seek assistance. In addition, the Diocese has continued to report contemporary and past allegations to appropriate civil authorities.
- In 2010, the Diocese launched a program to retrain all who work for the Diocese, in parishes, schools and in our affiliated agencies. Safe Environment Training and background checks are renewed every three years.
- In 2012, the Diocese published on its website, [www.dor.org](http://www.dor.org), a list summarizing the current dispositions of claims of sexual abuse of a minor by priests resolved since the publication of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*.
- In 2015, the Diocese established the new Office of Safe Environment Education and Compliance and began a new *Creating a Safe Environment* newsletter for our employees and volunteers to communicate safety information.
- Conducted background checks and provided training for more than 25,000 clerics, educators, employees and volunteers since 2002, a number which continues to increase. This is renewed every three years.

The Diocese of Rochester has been found in compliance with all provisions of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* in annual, independent audits that began in 2003 and continue to date.

### **How can I report suspected abuse?**

If you believe that a child is in immediate danger, call 911 or your local police department. You can also make a report to the New York State Child Abuse Hotline: 800-342-3720.

### **What help will the Diocese provide victims?**

For victims of abuse, you do not have to deal with this alone. The Diocese of Rochester promises to:

- Listen with compassion and understanding to your story and to investigate fully

- Provide you with names of advocates, support groups, counselors and individual therapists
- Give you help with spiritual questions and spiritual guidance
- Protect your privacy

We understand that coming forward with a complaint might be difficult – even frightening. We sincerely want to ease your pain and help you find healing. We'll also provide a link to individuals not associated with the diocese who can help you.

### **Does Bishop Matano meet with abuse victims/survivors?**

In one of his most important roles as shepherd of the diocese, Bishop Matano makes it a priority to meet with victims/survivors. He also responds personally to every letter he receives regarding clergy sexual abuse. Victims/survivors who wish to arrange a meeting with the bishop should contact the Victim Assistance Coordinator.

#### **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:

Deborah A. Housel  
585-328-3228, ext. 1555  
800-388-7177, ext. 1555  
E-mail: [victimassistance@dor.org](mailto:victimassistance@dor.org)

### **3. How does the diocese investigate an allegation? Are lay people involved?**

Upon receiving notification of a claim, regardless when it occurred, the diocese, in addition to promptly notifying appropriate civil authorities, conducts its own investigation, which is reviewed by an independent Review Board of lay experts in law, child protection, law enforcement and psychology.

The diocese also retains McCabe Associates, a private investigative firm.

### **4. What is the role of the Diocesan Review Board and who are its members?**

The Diocesan Review Board functions as a confidential consultative body to the bishop. This board is to advise the diocesan bishop in his assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors and in his determination of a cleric's suitability for ministry. It is regularly to review diocesan policies and procedures for dealing with sexual abuse of minors.

Individual members have expertise in law enforcement, the provision of mental health services and legal advocacy.

A list of members is online at <https://www.dor.org/protecting-our-children/review-board/>

### **Has the diocese made settlements with victims of clergy sexual abuse?**

The Diocese has paid approximately \$4.48 million to 44 victims of sexual abuse of a minor, dating back to the 1970s.

**How does the diocese pay for settlements with victims?**

Settlements were funded from a variety of sources — including the diocese’s pooled, self-insurance program and accumulated reserves — with the largest having been paid by an insurance company.

**Have priests been removed from ministry when claims of sexual abuse of a minor were proven or acknowledged?**

Yes. The Diocese confirms that all priests who have either acknowledged or proven allegations of sexual abuse of a minor have been removed from ministry. A list of priests and the dispositions of claims resolved since the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* in 2002 can be accessed at <https://www.dor.org/protecting-our-children/dispositions-2002-present/>.

**Is the abuse of children still happening?**

To the best of our knowledge, there are no cases of abuse at this time, but we remain vigilant through ongoing awareness, training and adherence to diocesan policy. Diocesan policy requires law enforcement to be notified whenever officials find someone is abusing a child.

The Diocese has not had a report of contemporary sexual abuse of a minor since 2006.