



Update on Safe Environment Efforts

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

Phone (585) 328-3228, ext. 1555

Toll-free 1-800-388-7177, ext. 1555

or email: victimsassistance@dor.org

The Diocese of Rochester is committed to creating a safe environment for all. Below is an update on the numerous initiatives that have taken place.

"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 on many occasions.

"I join with our Holy Father, Pope Leo, 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 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."

Every year, the United States Conference of Catholic *Bishops'* [Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People](#) requires an independent audit and each year the Diocese of Rochester has been found compliant. Most recently, during the first week of October 2024, Stonebridge Business Partners conducted an on-site audit, which involved review of documentation and interviews with key diocesan personnel, visits to parishes and schools, and interviews of volunteers and other community members. The Diocese was once again found to be in full compliance with the provisions of the *Charter*.

In March 2021, the Diocese of Rochester updated its [Volunteer Creating a Safe Environment \(CASE\) Policy](#) to include ALL volunteers, not just those that work with children or vulnerable adults. The training is offered exclusively in an online platform.

The Diocese of Rochester launched online training for volunteers who are minors (ages 13-17). This online platform was designed specifically for teen-agers and includes electronic acknowledgement of the [Volunteer Code of Conduct for minors](#), as well as an in-person training at the parish.

The ability to have all volunteers complete training online allows for ease of reporting, tracking, renewal and information retrieval.

On September 29, 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Diocese held a Zoom meeting to announce the upcoming changes to the Volunteer CASE policy, which would include ALL volunteers having to meet CASE requirements, online minor training and the Volunteer Code of Conduct form being included within the online training module. This meeting was held by the Bishop, Chancellor and Director of Safe Environment with CASE coordinators, Parish Leadership, School Leadership, Faith Formation Leaders, and others at a parish location that are responsible for the coordination of volunteers and ensuring that volunteers have completed training prior to participating in events.

In 2019, the Diocese entered a relationship with Praesidium to provide content for on-line training for employees, volunteers, and clerics. In late 2018, the independent firm Stonebridge Business Partners conducted an onsite audit at the Diocese of Rochester and at a group of parishes selected by Stonebridge. In a letter from Stonebridge dated January 14, 2019, they stated that the Diocese of Rochester is in compliance with the [Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People](#); They also provided three suggestions for consideration. The suggestions were reviewed internally and

Our Guiding Principles

The Diocese will respond promptly to all allegations of sexual abuse of minors where there is reasonable belief that abuse has occurred.

We will 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.

We will 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.

We will comply with the obligations of civil law by reporting an incident and cooperating with any official investigation.

We will use open and transparent communications with members of the community, within the confines of respect for privacy of the individuals involved.

implemented.

In 2015, the Diocese established an Office of Safe Environment Education and Compliance, began a [Creating a Safe Environment newsletter](#) for our employees, volunteers, and parents to communicate safety information, updated the Codes of Conduct, established on-line training for all employees and clerics, adopted a HCMS system to track all employees and clerics, successfully completed an on-site audit by Stonebridge Business Partners which included a group of parishes selected by Stonebridge.

In 2014, we established a Creating a Safe Environment Coordinator in every parish.

In 2012, a policy for the renewal of background checks was instituted.

In 2010, recertification of Safe Environment training for clergy, employees, educators, and volunteers was introduced in an on-line format as the Diocese entered a relationship with Safe & Sacred.

Many of the current policies concerning Safe Environment training and the necessity for background checks were introduced in 2003.

However, our initiatives go back decades. 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, meets regularly and provides expert assistance in the process of policy development, assessment of sexual-abuse complaints, and the development of services for victims.

A [Victims' Assistance Coordinator](#) was first named in 1993. The Victims' Assistance Coordinator receives complaints, organizes assistance that might be helpful for victims, and participates in the development of policies concerning sexual abuse and harassment as well as providing training to all clerics and employees in these areas.

Contemporary allegations of abuse are reported promptly to the appropriate civil authorities. In some instances, persons, including priests, have been arrested, tried and convicted. Clerics are subject to canonical proceedings and may be returned to the lay state.

Following the promulgation of the [Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People](#) by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2002 and revised in 2018 the Diocese of Rochester:

Significant Safe Environment items that have been addressed in the past include:

- Enhanced our Diocesan 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.
- Publicized contact information for our victims' assistance coordinator and offered training to all clerics, educators, employees and volunteers on the process of reporting allegations.
- 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, a number which continues to increase.
- In 2010, we launched a program to re-train all who work for the Diocese, in parishes, schools and in our affiliated agencies, training and background checks are renewed every three years.
- In 2012, we published on our website, 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 2002; this list is updated with the names of those with acknowledged or proven acts of sexual abuse of a minor.
- 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 since the first audit was conducted in 2003.
- For more information, visit www.dor.org and select the *Protecting Our Children* tab.