



# CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

## Diocese again in compliance with U.S. bishops' charter

By Karen M. Franz/*Catholic Courier*

Diocesan policy requires law enforcement to be notified whenever officials find that someone is abusing a child. But Father Daniel J. Condon hasn't made a call leading police to arrest anyone since 2006.

That's because sexual abuse by clergy — always perpetrated by a very small minority of priests — has become even more rare in the years since the U.S. bishops adopted the **Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People**.

"In 2002, we removed from ministry six (priests) one May 5 morning" and have had numbers of others arrested, said Father Condon, chancellor. He noted that the last three arrests of diocesan priests for crimes related to minors occurred after he called



Fr. Daniel Condon



Karen Rinefierd

the police.

"We've been involved in (preventing abuse) for many years. So what we're unpacking is the failures of the past," he said. "I look at my job as trying to unravel a 40-year-old problem. If you look at what the Diocese of Rochester has done the last 25 years, we have a pretty good track re-

cord" of offenders being arrested, people being trained and safe environments being created.

Although the Rochester Diocese began working to end child sexual abuse decades ago, forming its first Review Board in 1993, adoption of the charter in 2002 brought about major changes in archdioceses, dioceses and eparchies (Eastern Catholic dioceses) across the United States. Programs were created to train employees and volunteers on recognizing the signs of abuse and preventing situations in which it could occur. Background-check systems also were devised to ensure that the church did not employ known abusers.

To enforce these measures, the charter mandated that all U.S. dioceses and ep-

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## Support offered for abuse victims

By Mike Latona/*Catholic Courier*

Deborah Housel is the first point of contact for those reaching out to the Diocese of Rochester to report complaints of child sexual abuse by church personnel, whether recent or having taken place decades ago. She has served since 2013 as diocesan victim assistance coordinator, a position created in 1993.

The first step in the complaint process involves listening to the person and asking about the time, place, perpetrator and nature of the abuse. Housel explained that the diocese offers six professional counseling sessions, at no cost, to anyone who makes a complaint. She also offers to talk with the victim, either in person or by email or phone, depending on geographic proximity and the victim's comfort level.

Housel noted that her role is chiefly one of support, saying she remains accessible

for any victim even after that person's case has been brought to a close, often arranging for additional therapy sessions.

"I always ask, 'How can I help?'" she said. "We walk with (victims) for as long as they want to walk with us. I just try to be as present as possible, try to bring light into this darkness."

Housel observed that the greatest priority for many victims — including those seeking financial settlements — is to be heard and to obtain an apology from the Catholic Church.

"Money is not the healer. They want more than the money," she said. "They want to feel that God did not do this to them. They need to know from the church that the



Deborah Housel

person who did this to them committed a grave sin."

She noted that many victims also meet with Bishop Salvatore R. Matano to share their stories — a step she said often helps in the healing process.

"It's really transformative. He is wonderful with them," she said.

Housel added that the diocese offers support for anybody who comes forward, regardless of whether that person's allegation of abuse turns out to be credible.

"For anybody to even call is so hard. It's hard to make that first call to the place they feel abused them," she said. "Something is hurting in them. This is their soul and spirit, and ... they need somebody to listen to them."

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archies participate annually in a data-collection audit and submit every three years to an on-site audit of their policies and procedures.

A Jan. 14 letter to Bishop Salvatore R. Matano confirmed that the Diocese of Rochester was found to be in compliance for the 2017-2018 period with all articles of the charter audited on-site by **StoneBridge Business Partners**, a Henrietta-based specialty compliance auditing, fraud and forensics-services firm hired in 2012 by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The diocese has been found in compliance every year since the audits began in 2003.

(StoneBridge is an affiliate of EFPR Group, longtime financial auditor for the Rochester Catholic Press Association Inc., publisher of the Catholic Courier. The Diocese of Rochester is not a client of EFPR Group.)

StoneBridge's national report on the 2018 audit process including Rochester will not be published until May. However, in its **2017 report** of on-site audits of 61 dioceses, archdioceses and eparchies — including the dioceses of Albany, Buffalo and Syracuse — and data-collection audits of 133 others, StoneBridge noted that "Between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017, 654 survivors of child sexual abuse by clergy came forward in 129 Catholic dioceses and eparchies involving 695 allegations. ... The abuse was purported to have occurred from the 1940's to the present."

StoneBridge added that 24 of the 695 allegations involved current minors. Six of the 24 allegations were substantiated by June 30, 2017, and the clergy were removed from ministry. "These allegations came from three different dioceses," auditors wrote, adding that "Four of the six allegations were against the same priest."

StoneBridge's report to USCCB on its 2017 audits was accompanied by a survey report by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University. The CARA survey showed that children under the age of 18 in 2017 were involved in four — or 1 percent — of 373 new, credible allegations of sexual abuse of a minor by a priest or deacon received by responding dioceses between July 1, 2016, and June 30, 2017. "Nearly all of the other allegations were made by adults who are alleging abuse when they were minors," the report said.

These recent data are consistent with

# PROMISE TO PROTECT



# PLEDGE TO HEAL

## Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People

Essential Norms for Diocesan/ Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons

**A Statement of Episcopal Commitment**

• Revised June 2018 •

*United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*

the findings of **"The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950-2002,"** a study produced 15 years ago on behalf of USCCB by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. That report stated: "The distribution of reported cases by the year the abuse is alleged to have occurred or begun shows a peak in the year 1970." The report also showed that "Less than 13% of allegations (between 1950 and 2002) were made in the year in which the abuse allegedly began, and more than 25% of the allegations were made more than 30 years after the alleged abuse began."

Is the dramatic decline in recent years of cases of new sexual abuse by priests, both nationally and locally, fully attributable to safe-environment programs established in the wake of the U.S. bishops' charter?

"We're not apart from the culture," Father Condon remarked. "I think a couple of the differences are that in whatever environment children are harmed — whether at church, school, Scouts, sports programs or in their homes — they are more willing to report and more likely to be heard today."

Nevertheless, creating and maintaining safe environments is an ongoing effort,

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one that demands almost daily activity by certain diocesan and parish staff members, the chancellor noted. To ensure that work is done consistently, the diocese always requests that optional parish visits be conducted during on-site audits, Father Condon said, adding that he asked the auditors to select parishes themselves rather than having them chosen by the diocese.

**“Our people  
are very  
concerned  
that our kids  
be safe.”**

Karen Rinefierd, who has served since 2016 as diocesan coordinator of safe-environment education and compliance, said auditors made visits in late 2018 to St. Francis and St. Clare Roman Catholic Community in Waterloo/Seneca Falls, St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Clyde/Savannah/Lyons, St. Benedict Parish in Canandaigua/Bloomfield and St. Mary School in Canandaigua, meeting with parish and school officials in those places.

Father Condon noted that Rinefierd has worked to establish at every parish and school safe-environment coordinators who ensure compliance with training and background checks.

While the compliance of diocesan and parish employees with training and background checks is tracked by means of a human capital management system adopted by the diocese in 2015, tracking compliance among an ever-changing population of parish and school volunteers has not yet been automated.

Rinefierd acknowledged that enforcement is a daunting task considering that thousands of employees and volunteers in the diocese need to be trained and re-trained, and that parish safe-environment coordinators are usually parish employees who have many other responsibilities as well. “It’s constant follow-up and check-

ing,” she said.

Father Condon also noted that “we have a much broader net in terms of who we are asking to submit to background checks” at the parish level. He acknowledged, for example, that such volunteers as festival workers may interact with teenagers for just a few days a year. But they must be screened along with those who regularly minister with children because those few days of working together could establish a relationship of trust between a volunteer and young people, he said.

“Children are harmed by people they trust,” Father Condon remarked, and the diocese needs to ensure “that relationships of trust are transparent and open.”

Although the national audit report for 2017 found that many dioceses and eparchies suffered from disorganization and insufficient staffing that prevented them from adequately implementing safe-environment standards, Rinefierd said the Rochester Diocese is continually investing additional time and money in its safe-environment programs.

She noted that each parish and school is expected to provide accessible information on how to report sexual abuse. This responsibility, which also falls on parish and school safe-environment coordinators, is accomplished by means of posters and brochures as well as bulletin notices.

In addition, she said, “we’ve done quite a bit in terms of making safe-environment materials available in Spanish,” noting that brochures and bulletin notices are issued in both English and Spanish, and that a quarterly safe-environment newsletter is bilingual.

Parish and school safe-environment coordinators also work with pastors and parish administrators to ensure that parishes receive all necessary suitability for ministry documentation for visiting clergy. These forms or letters ensure that visiting clergy have complied with all charter-related requirements in their home dioceses.

“I met with (the auditors) formally a number of times and know that they were pleased with their parish visits,” Rinefierd said. She added that auditors found the parish and school representatives to be highly competent in their knowledge and execution of the charter.

Despite the challenges of coordinators’ work, Rinefierd said “I have never, thankfully, run into somebody who didn’t want

to do this and do it well. Our people are very concerned that our kids be safe.”

Such concern is seen in the Rochester Diocese’s commitment to exceeding auditors’ recommendations on some aspects of charter implementation. In its 2017 report, for example, StoneBridge recommended that dioceses conduct repeat training and background checks every five to seven years.

But the Diocese of Rochester continues to repeat them every three years because Bishop Matano thinks that is an appropriate interval, Father Condon noted.

“You want them to keep (the training) in their heads, you want them to remember it’s important,” Rinefierd explained. “We’re basically trying to build a culture so that when people see something that looks unusual in the environment — at a retreat center, in a religious-education class — we want them to pay attention to what doesn’t look right, and we want them to pursue that.”

Sensitizing employees and volunteers to situations that don’t look right

*Continued on page 4*

## **HELP FOR VICTIMS**

**Victims of sexual abuse  
by any employee of the  
Church 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,  
contact the diocesan**

**Victims’ Assistance Coordinator:**

**Deborah Housel**

**(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;**

**toll-free**

**1-800-388-7177, ext. 1555**

**email: [victimsassistance@dor.org](mailto:victimsassistance@dor.org).**

has paid dividends even beyond church property. "Because of our safe-environment programs, we've also had people identify cases where they thought a child was being abused (outside of church settings) and they've called the authorities," Father Condon said.

Rinefierd also noted a strong diocesan affiliation with the **Bivona Child Advocacy Center** in Rochester, an organization she described as a "huge resource for the entire Northeast" and a valuable resource for people in education, law enforcement, social work and religious groups. Bivona will serve as host of a child-abuse summit April 24-25 at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center, she noted.

"I think the charter is working in our diocese," Rinefierd continued. "It was taken seriously by Bishop (Emeritus Matthew H.) Clark and is being taken seriously by Bishop Matano. I would say that, after the Eucharist, this is his highest priority."

Although StoneBridge found the diocese fully compliant with all audited articles of the charter, auditors did offer a few suggestions for improving diocesan programs.

The first was for diocesan parishes and schools to add links on their own websites to the **Protecting Our Children** section of the diocesan website. In March, website code was made available to parishes and schools to facilitate this link.

The second was for the establishment of five-year terms for the diocesan **Review Board**. Under the charter, diocesan review boards function as a confidential, consultative body to the bishop/eparch, advising him in his assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors and in his determination of a cleric's suitability for ministry.

Members of the Rochester Review Board — one current and one retired police chief; a clinical professor of psychiatry; a licensed clinical social worker who works with men who were sexually abused as boys; three lawyers: one specializing in family law, another in child advocacy and the third in criminal defense; and a parish pastor — currently serve open-ended terms. The auditors suggested that fixed terms might make it easier for board members to step away as needed and also to recruit new members, which Father Condon acknowledged is a

"GOD WANTS  
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BE HAPPY AND TO  
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UPON THEM."

-POPE BENEDICT XVI



real challenge.

One of the tasks of the Review Board is to advise the bishop on the development of policies with respect to the charter. Father Condon said some such diocesan policies date back to the 1990s when the Review Board was first created and that the board had begun reviewing and updating them just prior to receiving a recommendation to do so from StoneBridge.

The Diocese of Rochester did not receive a recommendation on the topic from auditors, but in its 2017 national report, StoneBridge recommended that all dioceses develop a program to formally monitor the whereabouts of clergy assigned to lives of prayer and penance.

According to the diocesan website, such assignments are made in "cases where a priest or deacon has either admitted to a past act of abuse or has been found guilty of one, but dismissal from the clerical state does not occur" due, for example, to illness or advanced age. In such cases, the priest "is forbidden from all public ministry and from otherwise presenting himself as a priest" and "is expected to dedicate his life to praying

for victims and repenting of his past offenses."

Father Condon said the Diocese of Rochester is well aware of the whereabouts of seven men shown as having been assigned to lives of prayer and penance on its **2012 list of dispositions of sexual-abuse claims** resolved since adoption of the charter. He said most currently live in private residences or, in at least one case, a nursing home.

Father Condon said their whereabouts are monitored by Darlene Serbicki, associate director of priest and seminarian services, and that "other priests pay attention" to their situations. "Everybody's aware of their status," he said.

"We know where they live, and local people know where they live. They've returned, generally, to communities they were a part of. They haven't gone to places where they were strangers."

—Contains reporting by Mike Latona.

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ROMAN CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

## Creating a Safe Environment Newsletter

is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children and vulnerable adults safe at home, at church and in all places in our community.

Comments can be directed to:  
Karen Rinefierd,  
Diocesan Coordinator  
of Safe Environment Education  
and Compliance,  
585-328-3228, ext. 1255  
or Karen.Rinefierd@dor.org.

*Victims of sexual abuse by any employee of the Church 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, contact the diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator:*

Deborah Housel  
(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;  
toll-free 1-800-388-7177,  
ext. 1555  
victimsassistance@dor.org.

*All photos in this newsletter are for illustrative purposes only.*

# ADDITIONAL SAFETY RESOURCES

## ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES

### CHILDREN & TEENS' SAFETY SITES:

#### Webonauts Internet Academy:

<http://pbskids.org/webonauts/>  
*PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.*

#### NSTeens:

<http://www.nsteens.org/>  
*A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.*

## FOR PARENTS:

#### Common Sense Media

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns>  
*A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education*

#### Family Online Safety Institute:

<http://www.fosi.org/>

#### iKeepSafe:

<http://www.ikeepsafe.org/>  
*Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies*

#### Faith and Safety:

<http://www.faithandsafety.org>  
*Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America*

## LOCAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

**Bivona Child Advocacy Center**  
(Monroe, Wayne counties):  
[www.BivonaCAC.org](http://www.BivonaCAC.org)  
585-935-7800

**Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:**  
607-737-8449  
[www.chemungcounty.com](http://www.chemungcounty.com)

**Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:**  
315-253-9795  
[www.cacofcayugacounty.org](http://www.cacofcayugacounty.org)

**Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program**  
(Ontario County):  
[www.cacfingerlakes.org](http://www.cacfingerlakes.org)  
315-548-3232

**Darkness to Light organization:**  
[www.d2l.org](http://www.d2l.org)

**STEBEN COUNTY: Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:**  
[www.sthcs.org](http://www.sthcs.org)  
716-372-8532

**NYS State Central Registry**  
(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):  
1-800-342-3720

**NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)**  
866-313-3013

**Tompkins County Advocacy Center:**  
[www.theadvocacycenter.org](http://www.theadvocacycenter.org)  
607-277-3203

**Wyoming County Sexual Abuse Response Team:**  
585-786-8846

**Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:**  
315-531-3417, Ext. 6