



Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse

Offices of Safe Environment & Victim Assistance

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. What measures does the Diocese of Syracuse implement to ensure the safety of children, youth, and vulnerable adults?

Since 2002 through the implementation of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (Charter)*, the Diocese embarked on a comprehensive response to this issue with a five-step approach to ensure that all children, young people, and vulnerable adults are safe and protected from harm.

A diocesan Child and Youth Protection Policy and Code of Conduct which applies to all clergy; all members of religious orders; all parish and diocesan employees, including those who have no contact with children; and adult volunteers whose ministry puts them in regular contact with children, young people, and vulnerable adults. This includes:

- A Safe Environment Program requiring completion of a sexual abuse prevention training and passing of a criminal background checks of *all* clergy, *all* religious, *all* diocesan and parish employees, and *any* volunteers whose ministry places them in regular contact with children. To date, over 43,000 adults completed the initial Safe Environment training.
- An Office of Victim Assistance to provide support and services to individuals who allege sexual misconduct by a member of the clergy or other members of the Diocese. The Victim Assistance Coordinator begins the claim process and offers appropriate counseling and spiritual assistance as needed.
- A Memorandum of Understanding with the District Attorneys of the seven counties of the Diocese, which states that all allegations will be reported to the appropriate District Attorney before the Diocese begins its canonical (Church law) process.
- The Diocesan Review Board made up of well-qualified lay professionals and a member of the clergy to oversee investigations into allegations of clergy sexual abuse of a minor once the District Attorney's Office has completed its review.

Q. What is the *Charter for Protection of Children and Young People*?

The *Charter for Protection of Children and Young People (Charter)* is a comprehensive set of procedures established by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in June 2002 for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. The *Charter* includes guidelines for reconciliation, healing, accountability, and prevention of further acts of abuse. It directs action in all the following matters:

- Creating a safe environment for children and young people;
- Healing and reconciliation of victims and survivors;
- Making prompt and effective responses to allegations
- Cooperating with civil authorities;
- Disciplining offenders; and
- Providing for means of accountability to ensure the problem continues to be effectively dealt with in the future through the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection and the National Review Board.

A copy of the *Charter* can be found [here](#).

Q. What is the Safe Environment Program?

The Office of Safe Environment is responsible for educating clergy, members of a religious order, diocesan and parish employees, and volunteers whose ministry places them in regular contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The required Safe Environment training teaches attendees how to prevent child sexual abuse, how to recognize predatory behaviors, review proper boundaries, and how to create safe environments for children, youth, and vulnerable adults in our parishes, schools, agencies, and the community at large. Safe Environment training also emphasizes the need to create and maintain a culture of awareness, knowledge, and vigilance for those entrusted in our care.

Q. Who must attend Safe Environment Training?

A requirement of the diocesan Child and Youth Protection policy is that within 60 days of assumption of duties, employment, or volunteering, the initial face-to-face Safe Environment training session (2.5 hours) is completed. Those required to attend the initial Safe Environment training:

- All clergy;
- All members of religious orders;
- All parish and diocesan employees, including those who have no contact with children;
- Adult volunteers whose ministry or role places them in regular contact with children, young people, or vulnerable adults;
- Any adult who is interested in learning more about child abuse prevention

Participants *must* pass another criminal background check to complete the credentialing process.

Q. Who must attend a Safe Environment re-certification training?

The renewal of Safe Environment credentials every five (5) years is a requirement of the diocesan Child and Youth Protection policy, which includes a face-to-face Safe Environment re-certification training session (1.5 hours) and another passed criminal background check. The re-certification training session maintains a culture of awareness, knowledge, and vigilance for those entrusted in our care. Those required to attend the initial Safe Environment training are:

- All clergy;
- All members of religious orders;
- All parish and diocesan employees, including those who have no contact with children;
- Adult volunteers whose ministry or role places them in regular contact with children, young people, or vulnerable adults.

Participants *must* pass another criminal background check to complete the credentialing process.

Q. What is the Code of Conduct?

The diocesan Safe Environment Code of Conduct includes behavioral and ethical standards stating that those entrusted to our care must be committed to safeguarding, at all times, the well-being of by establishing and maintaining appropriate physical and emotional boundaries. The Code of Conduct also contains a social media policy as well as reporting requirements of when and how to report concerns of suspicious or unethical behavior(s) or communications inconsistent with the Code of Conduct.

To download the Code of Conduct, [click here](#).

Q. Does the Diocese teach children and youth how to protect themselves from abuse?

All dioceses throughout the United States are required to provide age-appropriate safe environment training for children and youth in parishes and Catholic schools. The goal is to give children and youth the skills to recognize and avoid potentially abusive and unsafe behaviors and situations.

Parish catechetical program teaches the *Circles of Care* program to students in grades Pre-K through 12. The lessons teach students about appropriate and inappropriate boundaries and behaviors by peers, adults, and family members, how to remove themselves from uncomfortable situations, and how to tell their parents or a trusted adult when something is not right.

Catholic schools in the Diocese use the Safe Environment education program, *Child Lures Prevention: Think First and Stay Safe* to teach students personal safety skills through a series of developmentally appropriate lessons created for grades Pre-K through 6. For Grades 7 - 12, the junior/senior high school faculty collaborate with professionals in their community who present on Safe Environment topics such as sexting, Internet safety, personal boundaries, and healthy relationships.

Over 15,000 children in our parish catechetical programs and Catholic School students received age-appropriate training last year alone.

Q. What is the Office of Victim Assistance?

The Office of Victim Assistance has a designated Victim Assistance Coordinator who serves as the liaison between the Diocese and individuals who report allegations of sexual misconduct of a member of the clergy or other diocesan employees and volunteers. The Coordinator's primary role is to:

- Promptly informs the alleged victim of his/her rights and obligations;
- To organize pastoral care to individuals who have experienced sexual misconduct in the past or present by a member of the clergy or by a diocesan employee or volunteer; to the individual's immediate families, and the affected faith communities;
- Coordinate reimbursement for mental health and spiritual counseling consistent with established diocesan processes and procedures;
- Serve as the victim's point of contact explaining Diocesan policies and reporting.

Q. How is the conduct of the clergy, members of a religious order, employees, and volunteers monitored around children, youth, and vulnerable adults?

The diocesan Safe Environment Code of Conduct includes behavioral and ethical standards stating that those entrusted to our care must be committed to safeguarding, at all times, the well-being of by establishing and maintaining appropriate physical and emotional boundaries. The Code of Conduct also contains a social media policy as well as reporting requirements of when and how to report concerns of reports of child sexual abuse, or concerning, suspicious or unethical behavior(s) or communications inconsistent with the Code of Conduct.

All individuals are encouraged to report concerning, inappropriate, suspicious or unethical behavior(s) or communications by clergy, members of religious orders, diocesan/parish/agency employees or diocesan/parish/agency volunteers that is contrary to the Code of Conduct to the appropriate pastor/supervisor and the diocesan Office of Safe Environment.

Q. What expectations does the Diocese have for reporting suspected abuse?

While working or volunteering as a representative of the Diocese of Syracuse, it is a moral responsibility to protect children, young people, and vulnerable adults from physical abuse, sexual abuse, sexual assault, or neglect. The expectation is that everyone will report any disclosure or suspicion of physical abuse, sexual abuse, sexual assault, or neglect to the appropriate civil authorities.

If a child, youth, or vulnerable adult is in immediate danger, call **911**.

To report known or suspected neglect or abuse of a minor (under age 18), call the New York State Child Abuse Hotline: **1-800-342-3720**.

To report known or suspected neglect or abuse of a vulnerable adult, call the Vulnerable Persons Central Register Hotline **1-855-373-2122**.

If any clergy, religious, have called 911 or the Child Abuse/Vulnerable Adult hotline regarding present or past sexual abuse or sexual assault allegations diocesan/parish employee or volunteer, contact the Diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator at **315-470-1465** who will initiate diocesan procedures.

Q. To whom should I report misconduct or suspected misconduct?

All individuals are encouraged to report concerning, inappropriate, suspicious or unethical behavior(s) or communications by clergy, members of religious orders, diocesan/parish/agency employees or diocesan/parish/agency volunteers that is contrary to the Code of Conduct to the appropriate pastor/supervisor and the diocesan Office of Safe Environment. The Office of Safe Environment can be reached at **315.470.1421** or safeenvironment@syrdio.org.

Q. What comprises the Diocesan Review Board?

Per the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, the Diocese has an established Review Board, a confidential, consultative body whose primary purpose is to assist the Diocesan Bishop in deciding of a cleric's suitability for ministry upon receipt of an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor, young person, or vulnerable adult. The Review Board does not investigate the credibility of an allegation if the accused priest or religious is deceased as no action can be taken in terms of that cleric's suitability for continued ministry. The Review Board will convene after the Diocese is informed that civil authorities will take no further action.

Q. What are the functions of the Diocesan Review Board?

The Diocesan Review Board assesses every instance of an allegation of sexual misconduct of a minor, youth, and vulnerable adults by (living or active/retired) priests and deacons under the auspices of the Diocese. The Review Board advises the diocesan Bishop on the credibility of the allegations and whether the allegations fall within the definition of sexual abuse. (To download the definitions of child abuse, [click here](#).) The Review Board must decide that:

- The allegation is credible and falls within the definition of sexual abuse as defined in the Child and Youth Protection Policy. If the allegation is deemed credible, the Review Board will make a recommendation to the Bishop as to whether the clergy or deacon suspected of abuse will be relieved of or continued on leave from any ecclesiastical ministry or function; or
- The allegations either are not credible or do not meet the definition of sexual abuse as defined in the Child and Youth Protection Policy. In addition, if the Diocesan Review Board nonetheless concludes that there remains reason(s) for concern, the Diocesan Bishop will determine the most appropriate course of action and the disposition of the accused.

The Diocesan Bishop will forward all credible allegations to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which will, in turn, refer cases to a church tribunal or retain the case and determine the future of the accused.

The Review Board also advises the Diocesan Bishop in his determination of suitability for ministry on a case-specific basis, and it regularly reviews diocesan policies and procedures for dealing with sexual abuse of minors.

Q. How is the Diocesan Review Board membership decided?

The Diocesan Review Board memberships must have:

- a minimum of five individuals of outstanding integrity and in full communion with the Church;
- a majority of laypersons who are not in the employ of the Diocese;
- at least one member who is an experienced and respected pastor of the Diocese;
- at least one member with particular expertise in the treatment of the sexual abuse of minors.

Members shall serve upon written appointment by the Diocesan Bishop for five years, renewable for an additional five-year term. The Board shall meet at least annually and otherwise as needed.

Q. Who are the Diocesan Review Board members?

- Christine Larkin, Chairperson
- Deacon Mark J. Berube
- Valerie A. Brogan
- Catherine Diana, LCSW
- Rev. John J. Kurgan
- Robert B. Murrett

For more information on the board members' biographies, [click here](#).

Q. Is the Diocese required to report allegations of abuse to the civil authorities?

The Diocese of Syracuse believes in the dignity of all children, young people, and vulnerable adults and reasserts its condemnation of child abuse. Originating from this belief, the Diocese of Syracuse entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the elected District Attorneys of the seven (7) counties within the geographical jurisdiction of the Diocese. The purpose of the memorandum was to create and implement a consistent policy and reporting protocol about sexual misconduct and abuse of minors by all members of the clergy and religious under the auspices of the Diocese of Syracuse. A copy of the Memorandum of Understanding can be found [here](#).

Reporting of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Clergy and Religious

All clergy, members of a religious order, employees or volunteers who have reason to believe or suspects that any child, young adult or vulnerable person has been the victim of physical abuse, sexual abuse, sexual assault or neglect is requested to make a report to the civil authorities and the Diocesan Assistance Coordinator. The Assistance Coordinator will assure that the Diocese fulfilled its reporting obligation to civil authorities as well as coordinate its internal process and assistance to victims.

As outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding, the Diocesan response to an allegation of abuse will consist of the following:

- Whenever an alleged complaint is received a Diocesan official that a member of the clergy or religious, who is under the auspices of the Diocese, has sexually abused a minor, regardless of the age of the

incident, the complainant will be strongly urged to report the complaint immediately and directly to the appropriate District Attorney's Office.

- When a Diocesan official has learned or has reason to suspect that a member of the clergy or religious, who is under the auspices of the Diocese, has sexually abused a minor, the Diocese will immediately refer the matter to the appropriate District Attorney's Office for investigation, regardless of the age of the allegation or whether or not the clergy member or religious is active.
- If the Diocese has reason to suspect that a member of the clergy or religious, who is under the auspices of the Diocese, has sexually abused a minor, it will make efforts to preserve any evidence of the incident. The Diocese will coordinate with the District Attorney's Office with respect to the preservation and collection of that evidence.
- The Diocese shall not do its independent investigation of a complaint before reporting it to the District Attorney's office, other than a preliminary inquiry to establish that there is an allegation that consists of conduct that rises to a sexual offense. If there is a question as to the criminality, the Diocese shall consult with the appropriate District Attorney's Office.
- The Diocese, after notifying the District Attorney's Office, will take appropriate action about that member of the clergy or religious order, as warranted, including removing the individual from his or her assignment, to ensure the safety of minors. However, once the District Attorney's Office is notified, the Diocese should coordinate with the District Attorney to ensure that any criminal investigation is not compromised. To that end, the District Attorney's Office must also recognize the obligation of the Diocese to take appropriate action about a member of the clergy or religious, who is under the auspices of the Diocese, accused of abuse, within specific time constraints prescribed by the norms of the universal Church.

Reporting of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Lay Church Personnel

In the case of allegations against lay Church personnel (employees or volunteers), the Diocese will strictly adhere to all applicable Church and civil law, including the Memorandum of Understanding, as well as to all relevant employment and workplace policies, procedures, and contracts, in the reporting, investigation, and management of such allegations.

Q. Has the Diocese of Syracuse made reparations to the victims of clergy sexual abuse?

On February 14, 2018, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse announced another step in its ongoing efforts to respond to the past sexual abuse of minors by clergy with the establishment of a voluntary Independent Reconciliation Compensation Program (IRCP) for survivors of clergy sexual abuse. The purpose of the program promoted reconciliation and further healing of those who were harmed by members of the clergy.

Mr. Kenneth Feinberg and Ms. Camille Biros administered the program. Mr. Feinberg is world-renowned for his experience in mediation, administering compensation programs for the survivors of the 9/11 tragedy, BP Oil spill, and the IRCP programs offered in the three downstate dioceses.

Serving as independent administrators, Mr. Feinberg and Ms. Biros worked with those who previously notified the Diocese that a member of the clergy had harmed them. These individuals were contacted by letter to invite them to participate in this voluntary program. Mr. Feinberg and Ms. Biros retained complete and sole

discretion over all eligibility agreements and settlement compensation amounts for the eligible individuals. The Diocese accepted their determinations without question.

In introducing the program, Bishop Cunningham said, “Over the past year, we have monitored the IRCP in the Archdiocese of New York, the Diocese of Brooklyn and the Diocese of Rockville Center. The response from survivors and their families has been extremely positive. We know and acknowledge that we cannot reverse the damage that was done, but we hope that this new effort will provide an opportunity to seek forgiveness for the irreparable acts of the past and perhaps, bring a sense of closure to some.”

Bishop Cunningham stated, “There is no question we have made missteps in handling this crisis. However, over the past 15 years, the Diocese of Syracuse has addressed this problem aggressively by reporting all allegations to the appropriate District Attorney, ensuring that no clergy with a credible allegation of abuse remains in ministry and in preventing acts of abuse through our highly successful Safe Environment Program. Survivors are offered counseling, spiritual direction, and other support to help them find ways to move forward. As we begin this Lenten season, we must continue to seek forgiveness as a church and seek reconciliation for those who have been hurt.”

To read Bishop Cunningham’s letter to parishioners in its entirety, [click here](#).

“In administering this program in now four dioceses, we have witnessed the reaction of the survivors. They have seen the Church’s desire to right the wrongs of the past,” said Mr. Feinberg.

The Diocese of Syracuse’s self-insurance general liability reserves paid for the cost of the IRCP program. The Diocese did not use any money given by the faithful to support parishes, schools, the annual Hope Appeal, the Foundation of the Roman Catholic Diocese, the Cathedral Restoration Fund, Catholic Charities, or any other charitable fund in the Diocese.

To download a summary regarding the claims reported to the Diocese before February 14, 2018, [click here](#).

To download the final report on the IRCP, [click here](#).

Q. Does the Diocese of Syracuse have a public listing of clergy with credible allegations of sexual abuse of a minor?

In continuing the commitment to fully embrace the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, the Diocese provided a list of clergy who have had a credible allegation of abuse since 1950. All of these individuals either have been removed from ministry or are deceased.

The diocesan definition of **Credible** is an allegation that, based upon the facts of the case, meets one or more of the following thresholds:

- Natural, reasonable, plausible and probable;
- Corroborated with other evidence or another source; or
- Acknowledged/admitted to by the accused.

Consideration of the trustworthiness of the source contributes to the determination of the credibility of the allegation.

Removed from ministry is a canonical penalty in which the cleric can no longer function as a priest, present himself as a priest, or wear clerics.

To review other canonical definitions used in the list, [click here](#).

To download the “List of Clergy with Credible Allegation of Sexual Abuse of a Minor”, [click here](#).

Q. How is the Diocese held accountable for compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*?

Each year, the Diocese of Syracuse participates in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) annual audit to determine its compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (Charter)*. An independent outside firm selected by the USCCB administers the audit annually. The Diocese of Syracuse has been found in compliance with the *Charter* since the audit’s inception in 2003.

An on-site audit is conducted every three years in addition to the annual audit, accompanied by in-person interviews of all diocesan personnel involved with child and youth protection and victim assistance, including Diocesan Review Board members. The Diocese will participate in another on-site in the fall of 2020.