

**SUMMARY OF AUDIT OF DIOCESE OF  
ST. AUGUSTINE CHILD PROTECTION PRACTICES**

This firm was retained by the Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine to conduct an audit and review of child protection practices, including historic events and current practices, and to provide recommendations for future best practices. The bishop's charge to us in conducting the audit was clear: we would have full access to all diocesan records and witnesses, and we were to pursue our investigation and audit to determine the true facts and circumstances surrounding these issues in an effort to ensure full transparency for the people of the diocese. Consistent with these instructions, diocesan personnel and clergy have fully cooperated with the investigation and audit. We have conducted numerous witness interviews and reviewed thousands of pages of documents. Our audit reviewed historic practices related to the protection of children. This included extensive interviews and the review of documents, personnel files, and reports. The following is a summary of our findings.

**a. The Diocese**

One unique factor in our historic review stems from the way in which the Diocese of St. Augustine was split into the other dioceses of the Province of Miami, including the Archdiocese of Miami in 1958, the Diocese of Orlando in 1968, the Diocese of St. Petersburg in 1968 and the Diocese of Tallahassee-Pensacola in 1975. In 1984, the territory of the Diocese of Orlando and a portion of the Archdiocese of Miami was split to forming the Diocese of Palm Beach, and parts of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Miami and Orlando was split to form the Diocese of Venice. Because of these historic splits in the territory, we have worked cooperatively with counsel and leadership

for the other dioceses in Florida to ensure that we have captured all facts and circumstances surrounding the protection of children and any allegations of child abuse wherever they may have occurred geographically.

**b. Pre-Charter Practices**

Prior to the 1980s, there were few – if any – training programs to protect vulnerable populations and children. The historical approach to this was consistent with the training of laypersons and clergy to follow the dictates of Church law. There was no specific training beyond this with regard to the protection of vulnerable populations and children, and no additional training was anticipated at that time due to the small number of reported abuse cases.

Awareness of the need for such programs arose in the 1980s. The Diocese of St. Augustine, under the leadership of Bishop John Snyder, acted on this increased awareness and took a leadership role in developing programs for the protection of children. Bishop Snyder called for the establishment of a Diocesan Response Team in 1988, and it was established in 1989. The team was composed of laypersons with a variety of backgrounds in law, law enforcement, medicine, psychology, and leadership in the community. The Response Team was charged by the bishop with receiving any reports of allegations of child abuse by anyone acting on behalf of the diocese, and independently investigating those reports and the facts surrounding them to ascertain their truth, and advising the bishop on appropriate action in light of the findings of the investigation. Fingerprinting of limited diocesan employees was also implemented at this time. In approximately 1998, the diocese implemented fingerprinting and background checks for all employees.

**c. Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Essential Norms**

In 2002, the Safe Environment and Protecting God's Children programs were put into place as part of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (the "Charter") and Essential Norms created by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The Charter was a comprehensive set of procedures originally established by the USCCB in June 2002 for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. The Charter called for, among other things, mandatory training and education to instruct on best practices for protecting children and avoiding occasions of potential abuse, as well as raising awareness of the signs of potential abuse or improper conduct that could lead to abuse. The Essential Norms mandated the creation of a Diocesan Review Board to review allegations of child sexual abuse by clergy, diocesan participation in regular audits to measure compliance with the Charter, and required fingerprinting and background checks of any persons volunteering or working in the diocese with children.

The diocese hired a victim advocate in 2003 to interact with victims of childhood sexual abuse by clergy and assist them in having their complaints heard and accessing appropriate counseling as needed and requested. While victims could call the diocesan offices directly and be transferred to the Victim Assistance Coordinator, a dedicated hotline for abuse allegations was established thereafter.<sup>1</sup>

When a complaint regarding sexual abuse against a child was received through the hotline, the Victim Assistance Coordinator would take down the pertinent information and provide the intake form to the victim advocate. The Victim Assistance Coordinator would also provide a copy

---

<sup>1</sup> The Victim Assistance Coordinator also receives complaints regarding boundary issues and inappropriate behavior by both clergy and lay persons. These complaints are not subject to the Charter and are handled under different procedures.

of the complaint to the Review Board chair, the diocesan general counsel, and, if directed by the bishop, to the judicial vicar and/or promoter of justice. The victim advocate would contact the victim and become the primary person to communicate with them. The victim advocate would provide relevant victim information to the Review Board.

When a complaint is filed with law enforcement, the Review Board defers to law enforcement's investigation into whether the allegations were credible. The Review Board would review the complaint and the victim advocate information. An investigation into the allegations would be conducted using private investigators and counsel as appropriate. Regardless of whether a complaint was filed with law enforcement, the diocese always took internal actions to address the complaint. The Review Board would take all information gathered by it, any law enforcement investigation, and the victim advocate into consideration and submit recommendations to the bishop.

When a complaint against an active priest was received, the priest would immediately be removed from ministry. The priest would remain inactive until the Review Board completed its investigation, determined whether the allegations were credible, provided findings and recommendations to the bishop, and the bishop determined appropriate action.

Independent of the Review Board, the diocese also reviewed active priest files multiple times since the Charter to ensure that no report or indication of child sexual abuse had been overlooked.

The audit found credible allegations of child abuse by clergy within the diocese in the past, all of which were investigated. A list of those accused in Florida is appended to the Attorney General's Report found at <http://www.myfloridalegal.com/newsrel.nsf/newsreleases/>

[501D187A34BFBE0485258618006E0DFA?Open&](#). We have determined that some of these were credibly accused of wrongful conduct within the current boundaries of the Diocese of St. Augustine. A list of these names, with the date of the alleged conduct, is attached as Appendix A.

There were no findings within the audit of reported abuse that was not appropriately acted upon. Furthermore, there was no evidence of any reassignment of those credibly accused of child abuse to ministries in which they could or did re-offend.

This review reveals a conscientious and thorough treatment of allegations of child abuse by members of the clergy. The Review Board has been independent, and the bishops have received and appropriately acted upon the recommendations of the Review Board. In short, the historic record for the diocese shows active engagement by clergy and leadership in advancing the mission of protecting children and further shows a proactive commitment to creating mechanisms to investigate and act upon credible allegations of child abuse.

Sincerely,

BISHOP & MILLS

Thomas E. Bishop

TEB/00077519.docx