

PREVENTING THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN

The Catholic Church in New Jersey has committed substantial resources to prevent any abuse of any child at any time by any person. Each diocese has comprehensive policies in place both to respond to complaints and to prevent the sexual abuse of minors. These safety policies and practices are regularly verified by an external audit of each diocese.

PREVENTION OF ABUSE

- **Safe Environment:** All New Jersey dioceses have fully implemented comprehensive “safe environment” education programs and have together, over the past fifteen years, trained more than 2.3 million adults, children, employees, clergy and volunteers. Prior to his anticipated ministry, every priest seeking to minister in every diocese must present a letter of suitability from his bishop/religious superior testifying that he has never been accused of sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult.
- **Background Checks:** The dioceses conduct background evaluations for all diocesan and parish personnel who have regular contact with minors. Over the past fifteen years, some 380,000 criminal background checks have been completed.

RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

- **Prompt reporting to Civil Authorities:** All of the New Jersey Catholic dioceses have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Attorney General and the County Prosecutors to facilitate the immediate intervention of law enforcement whenever there is any allegation that a minor is being sexually abused. The dioceses also promptly report all past allegations of abuse to public authorities, whether the person bringing the complaint is now an adult, no matter how long ago the abuse is alleged to have occurred, and whether or not the accused is living or deceased.
- **Zero Tolerance/Permanent Removal from Ministry:** When sexual abuse of a minor by a priest, deacon, employee, or volunteer is established, diocesan policies provide that the offending priest, deacon, employee, or volunteer is to be permanently removed from ministry, employment, or volunteer service and that any such offending clergy may not be transferred to another diocese.
- **Therapeutic and Pastoral Response:** Each diocese has a Victim Assistance Coordinator, who facilitates the provision of counseling and other professional assistance to help those who have been abused. In addition, all victims have the opportunity to meet with the bishop in order to facilitate healing.

Settlement of Claims: Claims of victims involving priests, deacons or others where the abuse has been established, are settled by all New Jersey dioceses. Altogether, the dioceses have paid out almost \$50 million in settlements to victims.

We regret that in decades past, some in the Church failed in their responsibility to protect children. However, today, no institution, public or private, has done more to prevent abuse than the Catholic Church in New Jersey. We will remain vigilant to ensure a safe environment for every child we serve.