



## Diocese of Madison **Communications Policy** Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Article 7 of *The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*<sup>2</sup>, approved by the Bishops of the United States on November 19, 2002<sup>3</sup>, mandates that “Diocese/eparchies are to be open and transparent in communicating with the public about sexual abuse of minors by clergy within the confines of respect for the privacy and the reputation of the individuals involved.” The Diocese of Madison’s compliance with all the directives effected by *The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, and the *Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests, Deacons, or Other Church Personnel* is an attempt to display the diocese’s dedication to deal with allegations of abuse appropriately, to “protect children and young people,” and to, “work with our clergy, religious, and laity to restore trust and harmony in our faith communities, as we pray for the Kingdom of God to come, here on earth, as it is in heaven.” (*Charter Preamble*). Through this communications policy, the leadership of the Diocese of Madison [hereafter “the Diocese of Madison” or “the diocese”] seeks to outline the ways it will continue to:

1. Express the whole Diocese of Madison’s commitment to the spiritual and emotional well-being of all victims of sexual abuse by clergy;
2. Express confidently that the Diocese of Madison is committed to the protection of children and young people;
3. Reflect a “transparent and open” relationship with the public with regard to sexual abuse of minors by clergy;
4. Take a proactive stance in publishing information about diocesan policies, statistics, and cases of sexual abuse of minors;
5. Promote accurate reporting of the facts regarding these policies, this information, and these cases;
6. Rebut and correct misimpressions regarding the same, and respect the rights of privacy and reputation of individuals involved;
7. Develop and maintain a working relationship between the Diocese of Madison and media outlets;
8. Define a clear line of communication pertaining to this subject, and
9. Make readily available (through diocesan media, i.e. newspaper and website) the diocese’s policies, contact information, other applicable information with respect to this subject.

### **Determination of Catholic Bishops and the Diocese of Madison**

The Diocese of Madison and the Catholic Bishops of the United States have taken a number of steps to address the evil of sexual abuse of minors by clergy. The 2002 drafting and approval of *The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, and the *Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests, Deacons, or Other Church Personnel*, as well as the subsequent implementation of these documents, and a commitment to review, revise and refine policies and procedures, are undoubtedly the most significant measures taken to ensure that allegations of sexual abuse are

dealt with appropriately. Furthermore, we remind ourselves that “our obligation to protect children and young people and to prevent sexual abuse flows from the mission and example given to us by Jesus Christ Himself, in whose name we serve” (*Charter Preamble*). The Diocese of Madison recognizes its obligation to victims of sexual abuse by clergy, and of abuse in general. It is committed to the spiritual and emotional well-being of all, and fully intends to portray this commitment through all its public acts and communications.

Dioceses and some bishops have, too often in the past, treated victims as legal adversaries. We recognize that this attitude and treatment can be extremely damaging emotionally, and often further severs the victim’s relationship with the Church. The Diocese of Madison’s obligation to all the faithful of the Diocese, its parish communities, and its mission (to bring all people closer to Christ through His Church) dictates that it will honestly defend its legal interests and assets. However, the diocese will not attempt to intimidate or discourage anyone who brings forth an allegation. Rather, the diocese will, through the victim assistance coordinator, offer them the appropriate counseling, spiritual assistance, or support group. The Diocese will also “[i]n every instance... advise victims of their right to make a report to public authorities and support this right” (*Charter Article 4.*). Furthermore, the Diocese of Madison will continue to reach out to all who may have been traumatized by abuse, by clergy or otherwise, and invite them to come forward so that the healing process can begin.

### **“Transparency and Openness”**

It is the Diocese of Madison’s intention to be “transparent and open” in discussing sexual abuse of minors by clergy, where it can reasonably do so<sup>4</sup>. The Diocese has and will continue to fulfill all the legal requirements for reporting cases of sexual abuse of minors by clergy, and cooperate fully with law enforcement agencies. We intend willingly to share information, as openly as possible, with the faithful of the diocese and with the public as a whole. The leadership of the diocese recognize their responsibility to take the faithful into their confidence, so that the faithful in turn will have confidence in the bishop and his representatives. The Diocese will reach out and assist the communities directly affected by ministerial misconduct. Whereas rumors and misimpressions are unhealthy and detrimental to the necessary healing processes, the Diocese of Madison will, through transparent discussion and disclosure of pertinent information, foster an environment disposed to healing. Likewise, the Diocese of Madison fully intends to cooperate with media outlets to communicate “transparently and openly” with the public.

### **Communication with the public through media outlets**

#### **1. After initial investigation**

The *Roman Catholic Diocese of Madison Policy Regarding Sexual Abuse of Minors, Sexual Misconduct, and Sexual Harassment* detail all procedures for the intake and evaluation of an allegation. However, in sort, initial first consideration is given to communications with the accuser while the preliminary investigation is underway. During that preliminary investigation – which is meant to determine whether there is even a semblance of truth to the allegations – attention is given by the Chancellor or Diocesan Investigator, to gathering initial details of the allegation. The Victim Assistance Coordinator communicates with the accuser to inquire as to their safety and wellbeing and to offer any initial counseling.

In all situations, the diocese will comply with all applicable civil laws with respect to the reporting of allegations of sexual abuse of minors to the appropriate district attorney or other appropriate governmental agency, and will cooperate in the investigation in accord with applicable law. The diocese will cooperate with public authorities about reporting in cases where

the alleged victim is no longer 18 years of age or under. In every instance, the Diocese will advise and support a person's right to make a report to public authorities.

If an allegation has even a semblance of truth, the bishop, in coordination with the Chancellor, the Victim Assistance Coordinator, and others, must make determinations regarding the opening of a full investigation. Such an investigation would be conducted in harmony with canon law, promptly and objectively. As regards the accused, all appropriate steps shall be taken to protect the reputation of the accused during the investigation. The accused shall be encouraged to retain the assistance of civil and canonical counsel and shall be notified of the results of the investigation.

It is here, "when there is sufficient evidence that sexual abuse of a minor has occurred", that the Diocese of Madison will, through the Diocesan Director of Communications volunteer information to the public, through the local media outlets. This will be done in conjunction with informing and assisting the parish community affected, and the canonical measures taken. The Diocese will protect the reputations of all individuals involved in volunteering this information, as neither a civil or canonical judgment will have been made at this time. The information that will be provided at this time will be:

- A. That there has been an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor against a cleric;
- B. Whether the person making the allegation is currently a minor;
- C. Whether the person making the allegation is male or female.

The individual making the allegation's name and personal information will not be provided unless he or she specifically requests that they be made public. If it is the case that the accuser wishes to remain anonymous, the only information that will be revealed to the public is that an allegation has been made by someone who wishes to remain anonymous. Moreover, the Diocese of Madison will not obstruct any accuser's attempts to make their allegations public. Otherwise, unless specific circumstances warrant it, no other information will be provided at this time.

## **2. Upon judgment confirming an act of sexual abuse of a minor by a cleric has occurred**

When the Bishop of the Diocese of Madison, after consulting with the Diocesan Sexual Abuse Review Board, judges that an act of sexual abuse has indeed occurred, the Diocese of Madison will, through the Diocesan Director of Communication, volunteer information to the public through local media outlets. This will be done in conjunction with informing and assisting the parish community affected, and the canonical and/or criminal measures taken. The Diocese of Madison will volunteer the following information at that time:

- A. That the Bishop, after consulting with the Diocesan Sexual Abuse Review Board, has made a judgment on a particular case, and what the judgment is;
- B. The offender's name (if the case is not well known);
- C. Whether further actions, canonical or otherwise will be taken against the offender, as well as explain the offender's future relationship with the Diocese of Madison;
- D. Other revealable information, such as whether there is a civil suit pending, assistance offered to the victim, and other specifics of the case (See Note #3).

## **3. When an allegation is not supported by credible evidence and judged unfounded**

When the Bishop of the Diocese of Madison, after consulting with the Diocesan Review Board, judges that there is not credible evidence that an act of abuse has occurred, or an

allegation is proven unfounded, the Diocese of Madison will release information on a case-by-case basis. The Diocese reserves the options to:

- A. Volunteer this information to the public, through local media outlets;
- B. Release this information upon request from media outlets;
- C. Reveal information to the faithful through diocesan media, i.e. newspaper, social media, and website;
- D. Attempt to restore the person's reputation through various outlets;
- E. Any combination of these options.

### **Full and Accurate Reporting**

The Diocese of Madison will make every effort to ensure that all information relevant to cases of sexual abuse of minors by clergy, diocesan policies, and procedures is reported fully and accurately. It will do so through:

- A. Contacting and establishing a healthy working relationship with media outlets;
- B. Cooperating fully with reporters, and editors of these media outlets;
- C. Making disclosable information and pertinent details available to these outlets in a timely fashion;
- D. Answering questions regarding this information, and following up on all unclear issues;
- E. Publishing the Diocese's information publicly by use of diocesan media, on its website, by social media, and in its newspaper;
- F. Correcting all misreporting, via direct discussion with outlet editors and reporters, and by use of diocesan media.

The Communications Officer of the Diocese of Madison will make the aforementioned information available for the outlets via press releases; face-to-face, telephone, and e-mail interviews; and through available diocesan media.

Additionally, the Diocese of Madison has established, on the diocesan website ([www.madisondiocese.org](http://www.madisondiocese.org)), a link entitled "Restoring Trust: Response to Sexual Abuse." This link will serve as a platform for the Diocese of Madison to make public, in a very accessible way, the Diocese's policies, procedures, program for establishing a safe environment and its contact information. Moreover, all the information located here will be made available, in other formats, upon request.

### **Single Spokesperson**

The Diocese of Madison will communicate with the general public through one spokesperson. The Director of Communications for the Diocese of Madison will be the media contact for all inquiries pertaining to the Diocese's sexual abuse policy, procedures, and cases. Information about cases of sexual abuse, diocesan policies, and other pertinent information will likewise be disseminated to the Catholic faithful and the public through the Director of Communications. All parishes, schools, and other Catholic institutions will be directed to forward inquiries related to sexual abuse of minors by clergy to the Director of Communications. His/her name and contact information will be well published, so that there is no confusion as to who should be contacted.

The circumstance may present itself where someone other than the Director of Communications is the appropriate person with whom media outlets should speak. The Director of Communications will facilitate the communication between these parties. The Director of Communications will also facilitate all communication with the Bishop of the Diocese of Madison, in the rare situation that he is the appropriate person to answer media requests.

## Conclusion

While this policy is formally assembled to comply with Article 7 of *The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, the Diocese of Madison recognizes it as a unique opportunity to serve its faithful and the public better. Moreover, many of the specifics of this policy have been informally in effect for many years. Through this communications policy, the *Diocesan Policy Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors*, the implementation of safe environment programs, background checks, our Victim Assistance Program, and other similar measures, the Diocese of Madison strives to ensure that children are protected and allegations of sexual abuse are dealt with appropriately.

In the words of the *Charter*:

“We pledge most solemnly ... that we will work to our utmost for the protection of children and youth.

We pledge that we will devote to this goal the resources and personnel necessary to accomplish it.

We pledge that we will do our best to ordain to the diaconate and priesthood and put into positions of trust only those who share this commitment to protecting children and youth.

We pledge that we will work toward healing and reconciliation for those sexually abused by clerics.” (*Charter Conclusion*)

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> This communications policy is separate from and not to be confused with the *Roman Catholic Diocese of Madison Policy Regarding Sexual Abuse of Minors, Sexual Misconduct, and Sexual Harassment*, which outlines, among other things, the procedures taken when the diocese receives an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor by clergy and other church personnel.

<sup>2</sup> Article 7 of *The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* states: “Each diocese/eparchy will develop a communications policy that reflects a commitment to transparency and openness. Within the confines of respect for the privacy and the reputation of the individuals involved, dioceses/eparchies will deal as openly as possible with members of the community. This is especially so with regard to assisting and supporting parish communities directly affected by ministerial misconduct involving minors.”

<sup>3</sup> Subsequently reviewed and revised in 2005, 2011, and 2018

<sup>4</sup> Cases in which the now-adult victim has asked the diocese to keep information private, matters under litigation, and unsubstantiated allegations, are among the few exceptions.