



DIOCESE OF
METUCHEN

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Diocese of Metuchen responds to publication of long-awaited ‘McCarrick Report’

PISCATAWAY – Like Catholic dioceses across the nation and even around the world, the Diocese of Metuchen eagerly awaited the release of the Holy See’s findings of its investigation into disgraced former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick – and the report finally came.

“The weight of our burdens grew heavy with the astonishing June 2018 announcement of the ‘credible and substantiated’ allegations of child abuse by Theodore McCarrick, the founding bishop of our diocese, and the subsequent revelations of his sexual harassment and abuse of some seminarians and young priests,” said the Most Rev. James F. Checchio, Bishop of Metuchen, in a letter to the faithful of the diocese. “These burdens seemingly grew heavier with each day that followed as we learned the heart-wrenching truth of the crimes and sins of the past and wondered how Theodore McCarrick was still given greater responsibilities in the Church, despite the rumors of his abusive actions with seminarians and young priests.”

McCarrick served as the first bishop of the diocese from 1982 until 1986, when he was installed as the Archbishop of Newark. He later went on to serve as the Archbishop of Washington, elevated to cardinal shortly after his installation, and served there until his retirement in 2006.

After the claims against McCarrick, alleging he sexually abused a minor 47 years earlier when he was a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, were publicly reported in June 2018, Pope Francis announced a “further thorough study of the entire documentation present in the Archives of the Dicastries and Offices of the Holy See regarding the former Cardinal McCarrick, in order to ascertain all the relevant facts, to place them in their historical context and to evaluate them objectively.”

In October 2018, the same month Pope Francis announced the investigation, the Diocese of Metuchen obtained an independent law firm to oversee its investigation and the full review of its complete archives, the findings of which were sent to the Holy See in May 2019 to be used in compiling the long-awaited “McCarrick Report.”

Addressing the report, which had been two years in the making, Bishop Checchio said, “While I am grateful to Pope Francis for ordering this study to arrive at the ‘truth’ of what happened, like everyone else, I am disgusted and appalled by what has taken place.”

The findings of the investigation into the Diocese of Metuchen's files regarding McCarrick concluded that all known complaints against him had been previously disclosed by the diocese, though new allegations were brought forward to the diocese as recently as June of this year. In total, the report identified that seven individuals, who were adults at the time of their abuse, came forward to report allegations of abuse by McCarrick since the first allegation against him was received by the diocese in 2004.

The report of the diocese's files also found that, in each instance, regardless of when or how long ago the abuse was alleged to have occurred and whether or not the accused was living or deceased, the matter was reported to the Prosecutor, the Attorney General and the Papal Nuncio contemporaneously with the notice of the accusation.

In addition, the review of the Diocese of Metuchen's files, which included the historic and contemporary records of the diocese, found no evidence of any failure to disclose abuse of minors by McCarrick or any attempt to hide abuse by him in relation to his promotion within the Church.

At the time the report was submitted to the Holy See, there had not been any claims filed to indicate McCarrick had abused a minor during his time in the Diocese of Metuchen. However, four claims alleging McCarrick had abused a minor during his time in the Diocese of Metuchen were subsequently reported, the first in December 2019 and the most recent in June 2020. At the respective time each claim was filed, the diocese immediately notified law enforcement and the Papal Nuncio of each additional claim.

"To all survivors of abuse, who know and live with this pain every day, and to their families, I am deeply and wholly sorry," said Bishop Checchio. "An essential part of my work as your bishop, as I see it, is to entrust the wounds and past sins of sexual abuse to the healing heart of Christ in my daily prayers and sacrifices."

Though, in large part, the crimes and sins accounted for in the Holy See's report belong to the past, the bishop acknowledged it is likely the report could cause warranted feelings of "sadness, anxiety, frustration, anger, disgust and pain."

"While it is important to honestly assess our past and the failures that lie within it, to recognize our mistakes and publicly confess our sins, and to make amends and seek forgiveness, this is not enough. We must, as a Church, – and I must, as your bishop – continue to forge forward," said Bishop Checchio.

The bishop said the wounds of the past have created scars, perhaps in some instances faded by time, but they will never fully disappear.

"We must remember these awful chapters in our Church's history with sobriety and honesty, so as not to be complacent, all the while diligently penning the future chapters of our Church's history with integrity and transparency, so we can be living witnesses of faith, hope and love," he continued.

Since his ordination and installation in 2016 as the fifth Bishop of Metuchen, Bishop Checchio has taken many additional steps to curb abuse in the local Church, adding to the good measures already in place.

“I am grateful for the steps which we already have taken and those we continue to take forward, but know that even when we think we have done enough, we must do even more,” the bishop said.

With the June 2018 announcement of McCarrick’s past transgressions, Bishop Checchio directed that the files and archives in the Diocese of Metuchen be re-examined; no new cases were found. Then, even before Pope Francis issued *Vos estis lux mundi*, or “You are the light of the world,” Bishop Checchio established a senior team of advisors to examine reporting processes and developed an independent reporting structure to allow for priests, deacons and seminarians to bring forward an allegation against anyone in authority in the Church, including himself, without fear of retribution.

Gratefully, Pope Francis’ Motu Proprio, which universally called all bishops worldwide to adhere to a mandatory process to allow for the ecclesial investigation of complaints of sexual abuse and related misconduct by bishops, not just priests and deacons, as had previously been the protocol, was implemented by the U.S. Bishops this year with the launch of the Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting service. Claims can be submitted to the independent service by visiting ReportBishopAbuse.org or by calling (800) 276-1562.

In addition to the Motu proprio, several other legislative decisions came as the result of the summit on abuse called for by the Holy Father and held at the Vatican in February 2019. These decisions will help to ensure the horrific actions of the past, cannot be repeated in the future. In December 2019, Pope Francis abolished the pontifical secret concerning cases of sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable persons; cases of child pornography; cases regarding the lack of reporting and the cover-up of the abusers on the part of bishops and superiors general of religious institutes. The Vatican also issued the *Vademecum* last July, which provides procedures to help ascertain the truth in cases of minors who have suffered abuse on the part of a member of the clergy.

In February 2019, the five Roman Catholic dioceses in New Jersey simultaneously released the names of the members of clergy credibly accused of the sexual abuse of a minor. No member of clergy who has been credibly accused of abuse is in active ministry in the Diocese of Metuchen, the bishop assured.

To oversee the handling of cases of abuse and the diocesan archives, in part, the diocese hired former county prosecutor Anthony P. Kearns III, Esq., as its chancellor in March 2019. Before coming to the diocese, Kearns served for nine years as the Hunterdon County Prosecutor and for four years as a Deputy Attorney General for the State of New Jersey. He is a trained mediator; family, adolescent and individual therapist; and substance abuse therapist, counseling both men and women ensnared in the cycle of domestic violence.

The Diocese of Metuchen also participated in an Independent Victim Compensation Program (IVCP), supported by the five Roman Catholic dioceses in New Jersey. The IVCP opened for submissions in June 2019 and closed in February 2020. Independently facilitated by two program administrators, the IVCP provided survivors of abuse with an alternative to litigation, offering a speedy, transparent and non-adversarial process to resolve their claims with a significantly lower level of proof and corroboration than required in a court of law. In total, seven survivors of abuse received settlements by the program’s administrators. To date, the Diocese of Metuchen has paid \$1,270,000 through the IVCP to survivors who were abused as minors. No donations given to the

Bishop's Annual Appeal, Catholic Charities, to Catholic schools, nor money given by a donor for a specific ministry or apostolate, are used to fund the program, according to Kearns.

In his letter to the faithful of the diocese, Bishop Checchio cited the measures that have been in place in the diocese since the U.S. Bishops adopted and implemented the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People in 2002. Among those protocols are: required background checks for all clergy, employees and volunteers, as well as training for all who work or volunteer with children, to teach them how to identify the warning signs of sexual abuse and how to prevent it; a reporting structure that requires diocesan officials to immediately notify law enforcement; a strongly enforced zero-tolerance policy; and the diocese's reliance on a review board to determine the credibility of every allegation against clergy, if not already deemed criminal by the authorities.

The review board consists of 11 members: three medical professionals, two members of the clergy, one former attorney general and supreme court justice, one former prosecutor, two former judges, one special education teacher currently sitting on the State Board of Education, and one survivor of clerical sexual abuse.

"We have been on rocky ground, but with the help of our Mother Mary, we will continue to cull the light of goodness from the depths of the darkness to renew our trust in God and grow closer to Him," said Bishop Checchio. "From that, only goodness can follow."

Anyone who has been harmed in any way, by any member of clergy, employee or volunteer of the Catholic Church, is encouraged to notify law enforcement by calling 1-877 NJ ABUSE and is also urged to reach out to the Diocese of Metuchen's Director of Child and Youth Protection at (908) 930-4558.

The findings of the investigation into the Diocese of Metuchen's files regarding McCarrick and other information about the measures in place to combat abuse in the diocese, can be found here: diometuchen.org/healing.

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