

Diocese of Joliet

Office of the Bishop



Blanchette Catholic Center
16555 Weber Rd.
Crest Hill, Illinois 60403

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with profound sadness that we have received additional knowledge of harm and misdeeds conducted by those who were in positions of trust and authority within the Church. This week the Pennsylvania Grand Jury released a report which details allegations of child abuse over a period of 70 years. The numbers are staggering. Words cannot adequately express the level of anger, pain and humiliation felt by people of faith, including myself.

I am genuinely sorry for the wounds inflicted upon precious children. I know that for many victims the wounds will never fully heal and for others the scars will remain a constant reminder of the pain endured. The violation of trust experienced by all is deep. It is alarming to realize the extent to which some of my brother bishops and priests have failed to uphold their obligations to care for the people. This is particularly disheartening for those of the clergy and laity who have faithfully served our Lord and yet find themselves with the burden of this weighty stigma. To all who have been touched by these tragedies, I am truly sorry.

There is no place in the Church for those who cause harm to children or participate in covering up egregious abuse. The protection of children and vulnerable adults is a critical component of the ministries in the Diocese of Joliet. Prior to the adoption of the national *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, the diocese had begun to address this issue of sexual abuse with implementation of a *Misconduct Policy* in 1990. By 1993 a committee, which would later be known as the Review Board, had been established. The policies and procedures developed by this board have evolved significantly over the years and will continually be evaluated and revised.

Today, the Joliet Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection is tasked with implementing the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* and all related policies. This includes screening all clerics, seminarians, employees and volunteers who work with children, educating children on ways to stay safe and how to seek help when needed, training adults about the warning signs of abuse, and the appropriate actions to take if they suspect a child is at risk. The diocese has specific procedures in place for receiving allegations, immediately reporting allegations to appropriate civil authorities, and assisting victims with access to support services. Men seeking acceptance to the seminary or diaconate formation program must participate in an extensive process. This includes psychological testing and interviews with respective committees. Throughout their training the candidates are constantly evaluated in regard to their behavior, self-awareness, social interactions, disposition and overall character. Every effort is made to ensure that only those who are suitable for ministry are ordained.

The Church must work diligently to regain the trust that has been lost. To promote transparency the diocese participates in annual audits conducted by third parties. These audits assess the level of compliance to Church and governmental requirements. Indeed, this week the Diocese of Joliet participated in and passed an audit conducted by the FBI to review the application and management of criminal background checks. The diocese first published a list of diocesan priests with credible allegations

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of sexual abuse of minors over a decade ago. It can be found on our website. I pledge to you that anyone with a credible allegation will not be returned to ministry.

Evil is present in our society. I ask each of you to join me in efforts to rid the earth of this scourge and to protect the most vulnerable among us. I ask that you work with me to heal these wounds which have violated our trust and challenged our faith. I ask you to pray with me that we will all come to know and live the true message of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "R. Daniel Conlon". To the left of the signature is a small blue cross symbol.

Most Reverend R. Daniel Conlon

To make a report of child abuse first contact civil authorities (local police and/or Illinois Department of Child and Family Services 1-800-25ABUSE). Then, if the allegation involves a priest or other agent of the Church, contact the Diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator at 815-263-6467.