

## **COMMUNICATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES: SEXUAL ABUSE OF MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS**

### **Communication Policy**

The Diocese of Spokane's communications policy reflects a commitment to transparency and openness regarding credible accusations of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults by church persons –Bishop, clergy, seminarian, employee, Volunteer, woman or man religious, independent contractor working on behalf of the Church.

This commitment is carried out with due respect for the privacy and reputations of all persons involved – accused, alleged victims, and others – and with respect to Church Law.

### **Communication Procedures**

Generally, the Diocese will make only the following information public:

- Name of accused
- Current ministry of accused
- Biographical information of accused (age, date of ordination, if applicable)
- Designation of accusation sexual abuse of a minor, including child pornography
- Approximate timeframe of the alleged sexual abuse
- Whether the accused denies or admits the accusation
- Action taken by the Diocese (e.g., administrative leave, report to authorities, exoneration), if public

The Diocese makes every effort to promptly communicate this information:

1. first and directly (in person) to the parish, parish communities, or other constituencies directly affected by the accused person's ministry.
2. second, to others (priests, pastoral administrators, employees, diocesan offices and agencies) affected and to parishioners at large through the diocesan website and the Inland Catholic, the official magazine of the Diocese.

Once the above has been completed, the information may be reported to the greater community through the secular news media.

The communication process ordinarily begins when:

- A priest, deacon, religious, employee or volunteer voluntarily resigns as the result of an accusation, or
- The Bishop takes action against the accused, or
- The accusation or action becomes public

The Vicar General makes every effort to guard the anonymity of the alleged victim.

Generally, the location of alleged misconduct is made public only if this information is helpful in bringing other victims forward. (Often, revealing this information places the anonymity of the victim in jeopardy).

Ordinarily, no additional information is communicated to the general public than is communicated to parishes and other constituencies.

The Vicar General may issue a prepared statement for radio and television news outlets. No questions regarding individual cases – other than strictly clarifying questions – are answered.

To respect the privacy of victims and the reputation of the accused, the Diocese will not ordinarily release information to the news media about accusations before diocesan officials have an opportunity to meet with both the victim and the accused.

If the Diocesan Review Board makes a recommendation to the Bishop, the Bishop's action may be publicized in a statement released in the following order, when possible, through:

- internal communications (affected parishes, clergy, pastoral administrators, etc.)
- diocesan website
- social media (link to website)
- secular news media

Generally, while an investigation is under way, the Diocese does not publicize any further details about the accusations than the information outlined above, even if the victim or the accused make public statements.

News media inquiries regarding accusations of sexual abuse of minors by Church persons should be directed to the Vicar General at 509-358-7305.