

# *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*

## COMMUNICATING THE CHARTER

### **Charter Discussion Guide — Multiple Sessions**

**Note:** If you have any questions about material in this guide, please e-mail Monsignor Frank Maniscalco at [fmaniscalco@usccb.org](mailto:fmaniscalco@usccb.org).

*You will be receiving a DVD with a 5:23 video message in which Bishop Gregory gives viewers an overview of the Charter. This video is designed to introduce a one- or multiple-session discussion of the Charter. (Also contained on the DVD is a 8:02 reflection by Bishop Gregory on the bishops' response to the child sexual abuse problem which is currently a streaming video piece on the USCCB Web site.)*

#### **Discussions of the Charter can be held as part of:**

- ✦ regular or special meetings of the diocesan or parish pastoral council;
- ✦ diocesan or parish finance council meetings;
- ✦ meetings of parish, diocesan, or national societies;
- ✦ special meetings of parishioners called to discuss the Charter;
- ✦ presentations in seminaries and other instructional settings..

**The outline for such discussions are provided by the Charter itself. The 17 articles in the Charter are contained under four main goals:**

1. To Promote the Healing and Reconciliation with Victims/Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse of Minors
2. To Guarantee an Effective Response to Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors
3. To Ensure the Accountability of Our Procedures
4. To Protect the Faithful in the Future

**Thus the Charter provides a “comprehensive framework” for:**

- ✦ Dealing with past abuse and its consequences in the lives of victims, offenders, and the Catholic community;
- ✦ Dealing with cases that arise in the future;
- ✦ Providing that this comprehensive framework is being implemented now and will be maintained in the future;
- ✦ Providing the Catholic community not only with protection from abuse but an environment that actively promotes the safety and security of children within the Church and in society at large.

**Preliminaries:**

1. Have your diocesan policy statement available to distribute to the group and any statements made by your diocesan bishop. Refer to them regularly.
2. There are pdf files at [www.usccbcharter.org](http://www.usccbcharter.org) to which this discussion is keyed. They can be turned into a slide presentation to accompany the discussion.
3. Before going into the details of the Charter, it might be good—even with a familiar audience such as a parish council—to ask how each person became aware of the problem of child sexual abuse by clergy. This should be done without the discussion becoming too emotion-laden.
4. At the beginning of the session, make a list of questions that the participants have about the issue of child sexual abuse by clergy and how the Church has handled it. At the conclusion of the discussion, you can return to the list and see how many questions were answered by what is contained in the Charter.
5. **Definition of Sexual Abuse:** A footnote in Article One gives the definition of sexual abuse. The points to be noted are:
  - the Charter does not adopt any particular definition provided in civil law;
  - the basis for considering whether an act of sexual abuse of a minor has occurred is whether the act or acts constitute an external, objectively grave violation of the Sixth Commandment. Collecting child pornography would qualify under this definition.
6. For the Charter purposes, a minor is someone who has not yet attained his or her 18th birthday.
7. Eparchies are dioceses of the Eastern Catholic Church. Their bishops are called eparchs. Eparchies and eparchs are always included even where only the terms “diocese” or “bishop” are used.

## DISCUSSION/PART 1:

### Preamble and to Promote the Healing and Reconciliation with Victims/Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse of Minors (Articles 1-3)

*Preamble: Draw attention to the bishops' expression of regret and apology.*

*Comment:*

The bishops indicate that they realize it is not only the abuse itself that has been damaging but also “the ways in which we bishops addressed these crimes and sins.” Thus their expression of sorrow is to the victims and to the whole Catholic people:

*“As bishops, we acknowledge our mistakes and our role in [this] suffering, and we apologize and take responsibility for too often failing victims and our people in the past. We also take responsibility for dealing with this problem strongly, consistently, and effectively in the future. From the depths of our hearts, we bishops express great sorrow and profound regret for what the Catholic people are enduring.”*

The bishops place the obligation they feel to resolve this crisis definitively within their role of carrying on the ministry of Christ himself with his “constant care for the vulnerable.” The bishops recall Christ rebuking his disciples for keeping the children away from him: “Let the children come to me” (Mt 19:14) and his “grave warning about anyone who would lead the little ones astray” (cf. Mt 18:6).

#### *To Promote the Healing and Reconciliation with Victims/Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse of Minors (Articles 1-3)*

Dioceses/Eparchies will

**Develop an outreach to all victims of sexual abuse of minors by anyone acting in the name of the Church.**

*Comment:*

In the first article, the bishops designate, as their first obligation, healing and reconciliation with victims/survivors of child sexual abuse and recommend several forms of outreach: provision of counseling, spiritual assistance, support groups, and other social services agreed upon by the victim and the diocese/eparchy. The Charter says this outreach is “to every person who has been the victim of sexual abuse as a minor by anyone acting in the name of the Church, whether the abuse was recent or occurred many years in the past.”

*Discussion Starters:*

*What are your reactions to the bishops' expression of sorrow and regret?*

*Discussion Starters:*

*Why do you think the bishops designated this as the first obligation?*

*Why is it important that the outreach services be “agreed upon by the victim and the diocese/eparchy”?*

Flowing from this Charter commitment to outreach is a concern that all victims come forward, even if others have already identified their offender or he is no longer in ministry or even deceased. This will enable the diocesan outreach to assist in healing all victims. In cases where the supposed offender is still in ministry, the victim can do a great service by coming forward so the individual can be investigated and removed from ministry, if the abuse is proven. Thus possible future acts are prevented and safe environments fostered. [Describe local diocesan outreach efforts.]

*Through this outreach, listen with patience and compassion to their experiences.*

*Comment:*

The outreach is not just “institutional” or “bureaucratic” but pastoral and personal, including offers to meet with victims and their families, listening “with patience and compassion to their experiences and concerns,” and sharing “the ‘profound sense of solidarity and concern’ expressed by our Holy Father in his Address to the Cardinals of the United States and the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops] Officers” in April, 2002. [Have whatever the local bishop has written or said about meeting with victims available.]

*Respond promptly to any allegation where there is reason to believe that sexual abuse of a minor has occurred.*

*Comment:*

It is essential to bring sexual abuse of a minor to an end as soon as possible. Unfortunately, for many reasons abuse can go on for a long time before it is reported. Thus it is important for dioceses to have “mechanisms in place to respond promptly to any allegation where there is reason to believe that sexual abuse of a minor has occurred” to make sure that it is stopped immediately. The procedures for those making a complaint should be readily available in printed form and the subject of periodic public announcements. Ways of making them known are the diocesan newspaper, its Web site, parish bulletins, and secular newspapers. [Have diocesan policy on reporting available, hand it out and describe it.]

*What do you think are some of the reasons why abuse can go on for a period of time and not be reported?*

*Have a competent person to coordinate assistance for the immediate pastoral care of persons who claim to have been sexually abused as minors by clergy or other church personnel.*

*Comment:*

Each diocese is required to have a competent person or persons to assist in the pastoral care of victims to make sure that this care is coordinated, effective, and consistent. [Have information about the local diocesan coordinator and her job description.]

*Have a review board that functions as a confidential consultative body to the bishop/eparch— a majority of whose members will be lay persons not in the employ of the diocese/eparchy—to advise the bishop in his assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors and in his determination of suitability for ministry.*

*Comment:*

Each diocese is required to have a review board which “will regularly review diocesan/eparchial policies and procedures for dealing with sexual abuse of minors.” Another function of the Board is to advise the diocesan bishop in his assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors and in his determination of suitability for ministry. Note the conditions: “a majority of whose members will be **lay persons not in the employ** of the diocese/eparchy.” [Describe the members of the local review board.]

*Not enter into confidentiality agreements except for grave and substantial reasons brought forward by the victim.*

*Comment:*

Although confidential settlements are common, especially where the facts are disputed or the amount is large, such settlements in sexual abuse cases have brought charges of “cover-up,” even though abuse victims many times ask for confidentiality (thus the exception in Article 3 on behalf of the victim). Even more important, the Church wants to avoid the possibility that such confidentiality could inadvertently result in an offender abusing again.

*Discussion Starters:*

*What do you think are the qualities that such a person should have?*

*What are the qualities that review board members should have?*

*What do you see as the advantages of greater lay involvement in dealing with the problem of child sexual abuse by clergy?*

*Why should the majority of the board not be in the employ of the diocese?*

*Discussion Starters:*

*Is the Church held to a higher standard in matters like this? Should it be?*

## DISCUSSION/PART 2:

### To Guarantee an Effective Response to Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors (Articles 4-7)

Dioceses/Eparchies will

*Report an allegation of sexual abuse of a person who is a minor to the public authorities and cooperate with their investigation.*

*Comment:*

The bishops acknowledge that civil crimes are best investigated by civil authorities. Thus, in all cases when the victim is still a minor, dioceses/eparchies will report the allegation of sexual abuse to the public authorities designated to receive such allegations. Undoubtedly, when the person is still a minor that will be investigated as a crime. So, in all instances, even in those jurisdictions where the clergy are not listed among the required reporters of abuse, dioceses will report these allegations. Obviously, it is equally important to cooperate in the investigation in accord with the laws of the jurisdiction in question. [Have on hand information about reporting sexual abuse of minors in your jurisdiction, including to whom to report and who are required reporters.]

*Cooperate with public authorities about reporting in cases when the person is no longer a minor.*

*Comment:*

In these cases—when a person is no longer a minor—civil authorities vary in their approaches. So the response in these cases is best determined in conjunction with local authorities. [Describe the policy of the local civil officials, if known, and the diocese’s response.]

*Advise victims of their right to make a report to public authorities and support this right.*

*Comment:*

However, in every case—whether it the person is still a minor or not—dioceses/eparchies will advise victims of their right to report the allegations directly to public authorities and support them in doing this.

*Discussion Starters:*

*Under what circumstances do you think you might have to report sexual abuse of minor?*

*How would you go about it?*

*When a report is made, should the name of the allegedly abusing priest be kept confidential?*

*Why involve the authorities if legally there may no longer be a crime involved?*

*Does this put a burden on the victim?*

*Why is it important to “advise” and “support” victims with regard to their right to report to civil authorities?*

*Permanently remove from ministry a priest or deacon if sexual abuse of a minor is admitted or is established, after an appropriate process in accord with canon law. Do everything possible to restore the cleric's good name when the accusation has proved to be unfounded.*

*Comment:*

This discussion obviously cannot involve an extended discussion of canon law. It is best to review the main points:

- ✠ Article 5 of the Charter opens with a quote from Pope John Paul II in his Address to the Cardinals of the United States and USCCB Officers in April, 2002: “There is no place in the priesthood or religious life for those who would harm the young.”
- ✠ Emphasize that the goal of the procedures found in Article 5 of the Charter is permanently to remove from ministry a priest or deacon if sexual abuse of a minor is admitted or is established, after an appropriate process in accord with canon law.
- ✠ Article 5 states that diocesan/eparchial policy is to provide that for even a single act of sexual abuse of a minor—past, present, or future—that is proven in canon law, the offending priest or deacon will be permanently removed from ministry, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state [popularly known as “laicization”] if the case so warrants.
- ✠ To achieve this goal in a way that is just and fair, the canonical procedures of the Church need to be followed.
- ✠ In 2001 Pope John Paul II emphasized the gravity of the sexual abuse of minors—which was already a crime in the canon law of the Church—by placing it in the category of “more grave crimes.”
- ✠ The Vatican department which has jurisdiction over these “more grave crimes” is the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which receives the reports of the preliminary investigations of allegations of sexual abuse of minors from dioceses and then notifies the diocesan bishops how to proceed.
- ✠ An offending priest or deacon may request a dispensation from the obligation of holy orders and the loss of the clerical state. A bishop may also request dismissal from the clerical state even without the consent of the priest or deacon.
- ✠ If the cleric is not dismissed from the clerical state (e.g., for reasons of advanced age or infirmity), the offender ought to lead a life of prayer and penance, not permitted to celebrate Mass publicly or to administer the sacraments and instructed not to wear clerical garb or to present himself publicly as a priest.
- ✠ Because factors such as the passage of time may make it difficult to complete the normal canonical procedures, the bishops are urged to exercise their executive authority (“power of governance”), in accord with canon law, to ensure that any priest or deacon who has committed even one act of sexual abuse of a minor shall not continue in active ministry. This is important for the sake of the common good since sexual abuse of a minor is a crime in canon law and in all jurisdictions in the United States.

*Discussion Starters:*

*What is your reaction to this policy?*

*Have the bishops adequately provided for keeping clerics who have committed sexual abuse out of ministry?*

*What do you think of the criticism that this is a “one size fits all” approach to the problem of sexual abuse by priests?*

*Before Dallas, priests who underwent in-patient treatment and were diagnosed as no longer a threat to minors were sometimes given an assignment, often in a non-parish ministry. What do you think of this previous policy?*

- ✦ The Article 5 procedures deal with punishment of abuse by clerics in church law and with church penalties. They are needed to deal specifically with a cleric’s ministerial status. Civil proceedings against a cleric are an entirely separate process carried out by civil authorities, and they do not affect to the cleric’s ministerial standing.
- ✦ When the accusation has proved to be unfounded, every step possible will be taken to restore the good name of the priest or deacon.
- ✦ An offending priest or deacon will be offered professional assistance for his own healing and well-being, as well as for the purpose of prevention of future abuse. [Have on hand the local diocesan policy.]

***Have clear and well-publicized standards of ministerial behavior.***

*Comment:*

Diocese/Eparchies are to have clear and well-publicized diocesan/eparchial standards of ministerial behavior and appropriate boundaries for clergy and for any other church personnel in positions of trust who have regular contact with children and young people. In the case of priests such standards assist in making clear the implications of the priest’s commitment to celibacy and the virtue of chastity in his everyday interaction with people in his ministry. [Have on hand the local diocesan policy.]

***Develop a communications policy that reflects a commitment to transparency and openness.***

*Comment:*

In this context, “transparency and openness” refers to a willingness to share information unless there is a serious reason to maintain confidentiality. Matters under litigation, unsubstantiated allegations, and information which a victim has asked the diocese to keep private would all qualify as possible exemptions to “transparency.” Within the confines of respect for the privacy and the reputation of the individuals involved, dioceses/eparchies are to deal as openly as possible with members of the community in these cases, especially in assisting and supporting parish communities directly affected by this misconduct. The diocese should make sure its sex abuse policy is well-known. [Describe local communications policy, especially with regard to making the public aware of the diocesan sex abuse policy and on dealing with the public and parishes when an allegation is made.]

*Discussion Starters:*

*What do you think some of these standards ought to be?*

*What do you consider appropriate boundaries?*

*What would you consider to be examples of violations of boundaries?*

*What are some ways in which priests can be held accountable to these standards?*

*What are the advantages of “transparency” in these cases?*

*What are its limits? How do you balance people’s need for privacy and the need to be transparent?*

*Is the local policy well enough known to the public?*

*How has our diocese demonstrated transparency and openness?*

## DISCUSSION/PART 3:

### To Ensure the Accountability of Our Procedures Articles 8-11

The Bishops established

*An Office for Child and Youth Protection to assist dioceses/eparchies in implementing “safe environment” programs and to produce an annual public report on the progress made in implementing the Charter standards.*

*Comment:*

This office is “to assist in the consistent application” of the Charter and “to provide a vehicle of accountability and assistance to dioceses/eparchies.” The director of the Office was appointed in November 2002. She is Kathleen McChesney, a former top FBI official. Her associate is Sheila Horan, also from the FBI. Note the choice of staff from a law enforcement background rather than a church background. They look at the problem with a fresh, independent, “no nonsense” point of view. The Office’s tasks include —

- (1) assisting individual dioceses/eparchies in the implementation of “safe environment” programs,
- (2) assisting church provinces [the territory containing an archdiocese and its surrounding or “suffragan” dioceses] and regions [the U.S. Dioceses are divided into 14 regions by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops] in the development of appropriate mechanisms to audit adherence to policies, and
- (3) producing an annual public report on the progress made in implementing the standards in this Charter.

The Office has instituted a compliance audit to determine whether dioceses are implementing the standards of the Charter. It is being conducted by the Gavin Group. The auditors are currently visiting about 11 dioceses a week, ending in late October. They are interviewing diocesan officials, members of the review board, victims who came forward since June, 2002, offenders, DAs, law enforcement personnel, parish priests, and seminary officials. Each diocese is to receive a report which gives “commendations” and also recommendations and instructions about additional steps that need to be taken by a specific date. The report of the audit will be released early next year. [Describe any interaction the local diocese has had with the OCYP.]

*Discussion Starters:*

*In what ways can the Office for Child and Youth Protection (OCYP) help our diocese?*

*What are the advantages of its being staffed by persons from a law enforcement rather than church ministry background?*

*How important is this audit to assuring you that dioceses are doing they are supposed to do?to do the audit?*

*The auditors are mostly former FBI agents. What do you think will be the impact of using law enforcement persons to do the audit?*

*The annual audit is supposed specifically to name dioceses which are not in compliance. Should it?*

*How long does this auditing process need to be in place?*

*A National Review Board to assist and monitor the Office and approve the annual report of the implementation of the Charter before the report is submitted to the President of the Bishops' Conference and published.*

*Comment:*

The National Review Board (NRB) was appointed by Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, the USCCB President, during the summer of 2002, and it reports to him. Its members—at the request of the first four persons appointed to the NRB—are all Catholic and lay. Its first duty is to review and approve the annual report of the implementation of the Charter produced by the Office for Child and Youth Protection [see above], as well as any recommendations that emerge, before the report is submitted to Bishop Gregory and is published. The NRB members were not given a term, although the whole Charter is to be reviewed in 2004. A summary of the NRB's first year can be found on the Conference Web site, [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org).

*Two studies to be commissioned by the National Review Board to help understand the problem of child sexual abuse by clergy more fully and to enhance the effectiveness of their response.*

*Comment:*

The Charter says that the NRB is to commission a comprehensive study of the causes and context of the current crisis. The NRB was also asked to commission a descriptive study of the nature and scope of the problem within the Catholic Church in the United States, including such data as the number of perpetrators and victims and the financial cost of this abuse to the Church nationwide. John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York is conducting the latter study. There has been much speculation about what percentage of the priests and deacons have been abusers, the financial costs, and what were the behaviors involved, e.g, the number of victims, their ages when the abuse took place, the proportion of one gender to the other. To know whether a problem has been adequately dealt with, it is essential to know its extent and exactly what was involved. So even at the risk of creating what is usually considered “bad news,” the bishops have chosen to find out this information.

*Discussion Starters:*

*Why is it important to have an outside monitor?*

*Does the existence of this Board help assure you that dioceses are taking the right steps?*

*What recommendations and suggestions would you make to the NRB?*

*Discussion Starters:*

*How important do you think it is that the bishops find out this information?*

*What do you think will be the effect of releasing at one time 50 years of statistics about the number of offenders, victims and costs?*

*Do you think this will help the Church to heal?*

*There are no comparable studies of other professions. Should they be done?*

*A restructured Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse to include representation from all the episcopal regions into which the membership of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is divided.*

*Comment:*

In 1993 the bishops established an Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse (AHCSA) which produced three reports, collectively entitled “*Restoring Trust.*” These reports made recommendations which assisted dioceses in developing written policies which effectively dealt with sexual abuse and resulted in a sharp decline in the number of cases by the end of the 1990s (most of the cases reported in the media during 2002 went back to the early 1990s and before). This Committee has been expanded to include one bishop from each of the USCCB’s 14 regions, guaranteeing greater in-put from across the country. The AHCSA and the NRB maintain contact through their staffs primarily, but their functions are different and independent of one another.

*In addition, the Bishops asked their Conference president to inform the Holy See of the Charter, to indicate the manner in which the bishops, together with the faithful in the United States, intend to address the crisis.*

*Comment:*

The USCCB is an organization of mutual assistance. It is not a legislative body. Very few of its actions bind the bishops, and those that do need the approval of the Vatican. The sexual abuse of young people by clerics was considered so grave a matter that some aspects of the Charter were turned into norms that now bind every diocese under special or “particular” law applicable to the Church in the United States, as approved by the Holy See. These include the obligations to have a written policy on sexual abuse, a person to coordinate pastoral care for victims, and a review board.

*Discussion Starters:*

*Were you aware that the bishops had a committee dealing with this problem through most of the 1990s?*

*How important do you think it is that the restructured committee is more representative geographically?*

*Discussion Starters:*

*Do you think that a national approach to this problem was needed? Why?*

*Does the involvement of the Vatican help assure you that the problem is being dealt with?*

## DISCUSSION/PART 4:

### To Protect the Faithful in the Future Articles 12-17

Dioceses/Eparchies will

*Establish “safe environment” programs to provide education and training for youth and adults in ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children.*

*Comment:*

Cooperative efforts among parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations, and dioceses are to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children. The Office for Child and Youth Protection has produced a set of guidelines for “safe environment” programs. They can be found at the USCCB Web site, [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org). Dioceses/eparchies are also to make clear to clergy and all members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to sexual abuse. [Describe what diocesan office oversees your diocese’s “safe environment” program and its initiatives with regard to a safe environment program.]

*Evaluate the background of diocesan and parish personnel with regular contact with minors, and employ adequate screening and evaluative techniques to decide fitness of candidates for ordination.*

**Comment:**

Screening personnel is an important tool to prevent abuse in the first place. Dioceses/eparchies are to evaluate the background of all diocesan/eparchial and parish personnel who have regular contact with minors. Resources to help this screening process can be found in law enforcement and other community agencies. In this matter, of course, it is especially important to employ adequate screening and evaluative techniques in deciding the fitness of candidates for ordination to the priesthood and the diaconate. Evaluation should continue throughout the process of formation (cf. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Program of Priestly Formation*, 1993, no. 513). [Describe local screening processes and who must be screened.]

*Discussion Starters:*

*What are the conditions to have a safe environment?*

*What environments in your experience do you consider “safe”?*

*What environments are not safe?*

*What do you teach your children about keeping themselves safe?*

*Name some of the standards that should be observed by persons in positions of trust with regard to minors?*

*Discussion Starters:*

*What should be looked for in background checks?*

*What is your reaction to this diocese’s screening processes?*

*Not transfer any priest or deacon with a proven act of sexual abuse of a minor for ministerial assignment in an another diocese.*

*Comment:*

A diocesan priest or deacon usually spends his priestly career in the diocese of his ordination. However, it is possible for him to work in other dioceses as well, with the permission of his bishop and the bishop of the place where he seeks to work. In retirement, a priest may move to another place, but would still need permission to carry out any priestly functions in his place of retirement. (A religious order priest can be assigned to work in whatever diocese his religious order has a ministry, but he needs the permission of the local bishop to work in a particular diocese.) To prevent a priest or deacon who is demonstrated to have abused a minor from going to a place where he is not known and perhaps abusing again, the bishops commit themselves not to allow the transfer of any such priest or deacon for ministerial assignment to another diocese/eparchy or religious province. This would obviously apply in cases in which the cleric was not for some reason dismissed from the clerical state.

*Before transferring a priest or deacon for residence elsewhere, provide the bishop or religious superior there with information about any act of sexual abuse of a minor or other information that the cleric may be a danger to children or young people.*

*Comment:*

When it is a matter not of having a ministerial assignment but only of residence, the Charter provides that before a transfer of residence is made, the cleric's bishop or religious superior will, in a confidential manner, supply the local bishop or religious superior of the proposed place of residence with "any and all information concerning any act of sexual abuse of a minor and any other information that he has been or may be a danger to children or young people" (Cf. National Conference of Catholic Bishops and Conference of Major Superiors of Men, *Proposed Guidelines on the Transfer or Assignment of Clergy and Religious*, 1993.).

*Discussion Starters:*

*Why is there a need for a "no transfer" policy?*

*Have you heard of instances where a priest from one diocese abused in another?*

*How important do you think it is for bishops share information regarding transfer of residence of a cleric who has committed abuse?*

*What would your reaction be to a former offender residing in your area?*

*Should there be public warnings in such situations?*

*Meet periodically with superiors of religious communities to coordinate on allegations made against a cleric member of a religious institute ministering in a diocese/eparchy.*

*Comment:*

A third of the priests of the United States belong to religious orders or communities. Their direct superiors are not the bishops but the superiors of their communities. To provide for the proper oversight of these priests and the application of the principles of the Charter to them, the Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse and the officers of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men—the organization of religious order superiors which parallels the USCCB—are meeting on the national level to determine how this is to be done. Coordination between diocesan bishops and the major superiors of local clerical institutes concerning allegations made against a cleric member of a religious institute ministering in a diocese/eparchy is called for. [Describe the services offered by religious communities in the local diocese.]

*In addition, the Bishops offered to cooperate with other churches and organizations to conduct research about sexual abuse of minors, given the extent of the problem in society at large.*

*Comment:*

The Bishops offer to work with other groups—churches, universities, foundations, child welfare associations—to do research into this problem which affects not only the Church but also society at large—families, other professions, sports, public and private school systems, and volunteer and professional agencies that deal with children.

*Discussion Starters:*

*How do diocesan and religious order priests differ in dioceses?*

*Do most people understand the difference?*

*What are some of the organizations that the Church should try to work with?*

*With regard to sexual abuse of minors, what does the Catholic Church have to offer other organizations?*

**Note:**

The last article of the Charter pledges cooperation with a planned Apostolic Visitation of seminaries and religious houses of formation in the United States that was recommended by the cardinals of the United States and USCCB officers together with the heads of the relevant Vatican offices at the special meeting that took place in Rome, April 2002. An apostolic visitation is an inspection mandated by the Holy See and carried on by the local bishops directed by and with the results reported back to the Holy See. This **does not imply** that the current seminary training is related to the crisis which involves priests mainly from past eras of seminary formation. But the visitation does provide the opportunity to review the question of human formation for celibate chastity and is an opportunity to strengthen priestly formation programs so that they may provide God's people with mature and holy priests.

To close, read the pledges made by the bishops in the conclusion of the Charter.

In the Charter, the Bishops made the following pledges:

- ✠ We pledge most solemnly to one another and to you, God's people, 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 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.
- ✠ We make these pledges with a humbling sense of our own limitations, relying on the help of God and the support of his faithful priests and people to work with us to fulfill them. Above all we believe, in the words of St. Paul as cited by Pope John Paul II in April 2002, that "where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more" (Rm 5:20). This is faith's message. With this faith, we are confident that we will not be conquered by evil but overcome evil with good (cf. Rm 12:21).

*Discussion Starters:*

*Do you think the bishops are living up to these pledges?*

*How?*

**NOTES:**