



## National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People

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### **Annual Progress Report to the Body of Bishops** Dr. Francesco Cesareo, Chairman, National Review Board June 2018

Good morning your Eminences, your Excellencies, distinguished visitors and guests. My name is Dr. Francesco Cesareo. I am the Chairman for the National Review Board.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss with you the extremely important, and especially relevant, issue of sexual abuse of minors in the Church and to provide you with a status report on how the Church is continuing to respond to this issue.

Current events continue to highlight the toll of abuse within both the Church and the secular world.

“Senate serves subpoenas for hearing on sexual abuse of Olympic athletes.”

“Chicago Tribune report finds 500 cases of sexual abuse, rape in Chicago Public Schools over 10 years.”

“Catholic Church to pay \$210 million to abuse victims.”

“Chilean Catholics weather fallout from clergy sexual abuse crisis.”

“Report on priest abuse in Pennsylvania to be most extensive yet.”

These recent headlines reveal the unfortunate truth that no part of our society, neither the Church, nor the secular world, remains untouched from the scourge of abuse. The extent of abuse in institutions of higher learning, Olympic sports, Hollywood, government bodies, and public schools - organizations where children and adult members should feel safe - is now more fully coming to light.

Despite the progress we have made in the Church and the ongoing efforts of dioceses, many among the faithful and in society at large question the commitment of the Church, and in particular, the bishops, in addressing the sexual abuse of children. The faithful demand that the safety of children and young people and the support of victims/survivors remain core values of the Church. This responsibility must compel you to never waver in your commitment to protect the most vulnerable, offer outreach and healing to victims/survivors of abuse, and defend the life and dignity of the human person. There is no room for complacency in this fight to protect our children, young people, and vulnerable adults.

Since 2002, you and your dioceses have worked to better protect children and support victims/survivors by committing substantial financial resources, staff, and effort to implement the guidelines of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. The annual audit of the *Charter* remains an effective mechanism for your dioceses to hold themselves accountable to the faithful.

According to last year's audit of the *Charter* by Stonebridge Business Partners, historic allegations of abuse continue to emerge. More troubling, current abuse of minors by members of the clergy, though declining, is still taking place.

Last year's audit found that the number of allegations - the vast majority which occurred more than 30 years ago, decreased significantly as compared to 2015 and 2016, and were similar to the number reported in 2014. However, there were 24 allegations that involved current minors. Of these, six were substantiated as of June 30, 2017 and the clergy were removed from ministry. These allegations came from three different dioceses. Four of the six allegations were against the same priest. Eight of the 24 allegations from minors were unsubstantiated. Three of the 24 allegations from minors were categorized as "unable to be proven," and investigations were still in process for five of the allegations. Two others were either forwarded to a diocese overseas or a religious institute. Each allegation received by a diocese should serve as an important reminder that your vigilance is required.

While the number of allegations has been decreasing, reports of boundary violations have been on the rise. These are red flags that cannot be ignored as they could be a precursor to incidents of sexual abuse of minors.

Based on the findings of the audit, fifty-eight of 61 dioceses who received an on-site audit were found fully compliant with the *Charter*, and another 133 dioceses were found compliant with the data collection.

Three eparchies were found to be non-compliant with certain articles of the *Charter*. All three of these eparchies were found non-compliant with Article 2 which refers to review boards. One eparchy's review board had not met in several years, one did not have a functioning review board as of the end of the audit period, and the third did not meet the minimum requirement of five members and had not met in several years. The importance of the review board in serving as a confidential consultative body to the bishop cannot be overstated. Review boards help to ensure that allegations of abuse are taken seriously and that victims/survivors are heard. They also provide the bishop with informed advice regarding an accused cleric's suitability for ministry.

One of the three eparchies was also found non-compliant with Articles 12 and 13 of the *Charter*, due to a lack of safe environment training and background checks. With that being said, these eparchies have communicated with StoneBridge and the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection their plans towards full compliance with all articles of the *Charter*.

Three dioceses/eparchies did not participate in the audit. One of these dioceses was unable to participate due to hurricanes Irma and Maria. The 2017 participation rate is similar to previous years: in 2015, six dioceses and eparchies did not participate; in 2016 two did not participate. Going forward, 100% audit participation must remain a goal of the episcopate. Efforts are being made to include these dioceses/eparchies in next year's audit.

One encouraging result of this year's audit is the increase in the number of parish audits. During this audit cycle, among parishes receiving on-site audits from StoneBridge, external parish audits were conducted in 28 dioceses, as opposed to 23 the previous year. In addition, 95 dioceses now indicate that they perform internal parish audits, which represents an increase of 10 dioceses from last year. Unfortunately, some dioceses utilize neither external nor internal parish audits.

Parish audits allow diocesan leaders to more fully monitor the state of *Charter* implementation where it matters most. The National Review Board continues to stress the importance and necessity for dioceses to perform external or internal parish audits. It is in parishes and schools where abuse occurs, and where the rubber hits the road as to whether the *Charter* and your local policies are being implemented.

While the overwhelming majority of dioceses are meeting the requirements of the *Charter*, and some are going above and beyond its guidelines, a growing number have become complacent in their efforts. This sense of complacency, identified by the auditors in successive years, has manifested in a variety of ways.

For example, there are dioceses who did not complete background clearances in a timely manner. In some cases, the auditors found poor record-keeping which could potentially lead to unscreened individuals interacting with children.

Diocesan oversight of parishes also needs improvement. In some dioceses, a high percentage of children did not receive safe environment training, the majority of whom attend parish religious education programs. Safe environment staff at the diocesan level have also faced difficulties obtaining important information, such as compliance data, from parishes and schools. In some cases, dioceses do not require pastors to verify that they are implementing safe environment training in their parishes.

Another form of complacency is the omission of the 2011 *Charter* revisions by some dioceses in their diocesan policies. In some dioceses, recommendations made in the *Annual Report* or in management letters are not implemented.

These are just some of the examples of complacency that have been identified in successive years by the auditors. Every bishop must ensure their systems of child protection and victim outreach are fully effective. If child and youth protection and the support of victims/survivors are core values of the Church, every effort must be made to ensure adequate resources – financial, personnel, and time – are dedicated to creating a culture of protection and healing. The recommendations of the auditors must be taken seriously by each bishop, and concrete steps must be taken to protect both the children you safeguard, and your dioceses as a whole. You cannot afford to waver in your commitment to your “Promise to Protect and Pledge to Heal.”

During the current Plenary Assembly, proposed revisions to the *Charter* will be considered for the first time in 7 years. The *Charter* revisions represent an opportunity to further improve your methods of preventing the abuse of minors.

This year’s revisions are the product of a dedicated effort by you, your diocesan staff, the National Review Board and a variety of Committees at the USCCB, including the Committees on the Protection of Children and Young People; Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations; and Canonical Affairs and Church Governance, as well as the Office of General Counsel. The National Review Board supports the proposed revisions to the *Charter* as far as they go.

The Church in the United States has put in place rigorous safeguards for the protection of children. It is the sincere hope of the National Review Board that the forthcoming revisions of the *Charter*, the auditor’s recommendations found within the *Annual Report*, and the following recommendations from the National Review Board will enable dioceses to more effectively protect and heal.

The National Review Board continues to highlight:

- The importance of sending all allegations to diocesan review boards since we have learned in recent public cases that bishops have caused harm to victims/survivors and their own dioceses when this is not the case.
- The need for review boards to meet annually, at a minimum, as even when a diocese has not received an allegation for a number of years, the review board can serve an important role in reviewing and improving policies and procedures.
- A clearer definition of “openness and transparency” with the public and the faithful regarding allegations, including formal guidelines or policies for communicating with parishes and communities who are directly affected by abuse.
- Effective monitoring and supervision of offending clergy who have been removed from active ministry but have not been laicized due to old age, infirmities, mental illness, or other factors so as to prevent further harm to children and young people.
- Maintaining the independence and objectivity of the annual audit process in order to ensure its legitimacy and credibility with the faithful.
- The use of formal policies regarding the review of boundary violations.

As a result of the sex abuse scandals, the Church lost much of its moral credibility with the public. The bishops must continue to be champions for the protection of minors and the support of victims/survivors, as to restore their credibility. The National Review Board recognizes the many burdens and responsibilities with which the bishops are tasked. We are committed to providing you with the expertise and advice that will support you in your ministries as the shepherds of our Church.

The National Review Board is grateful to the bishops for all they have done and continue to do in confronting clerical sex abuse. With the attention being given to this issue as a result of sexual abuse that has taken place in organizations outside of the Church, you have an opportunity to truly model and lead society. This opportunity must not be wasted. As Pope St. John Paul II stated on numerous occasions: “Do not be afraid!”

Thank you for all you do to keep children safe and offer healing to victims/survivors.

At this time, I would like to open it up for any questions or comments.