



National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-5413 • FAX 202-541-5410

2021 Progress Report to the Body of Bishops

Suzanne Healy, Chair

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Good morning your eminences and excellencies.

My name is Suzanne Healy and I thank you for the opportunity to address you as the Chair of the National Review board (NRB). This is our second time meeting virtually and I really look forward to the day when I can address you in person and engage in conversation with you about the collective thinking of the NRB.

The U.S. Church has been implementing the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* for close to twenty years. The annual audit from Stonebridge Business Partners is the vehicle to measure compliance with the *Charter*. The safe environment trainings, background checks, letters of suitability, and codes of conduct have an impact on creating safe environments and the slow journey on changing the culture. Such endeavors have protected children; however, the change of culture cannot be complete unless everyone follows the rules.

In 2020, 4250 total allegations were reported but as we know those are predominately historical allegations mostly from the 1960s, 70s and 80s. This large number gives the appearance that nothing has changed in the Church and we know that is not true. The number of current allegations reported this year is 22 which is less than the previous year. Of course, one is too many. Those 22 represent less than one percent of the total 4250 reported allegations. And similarly, the 2004 John Jay study found the allegations over the period (1950-2002) represented about 4% of all ordained clergy (i.e., priests or deacons or members of religious orders), active in the USA during the time covered by the study. Today the audit has revealed to us that the number of new allegations of ordained clergy is less than one percent. These numbers are evidence that the great work and efforts you and your dioceses/eparchies have done by implementing safe environment programs and policies are truly making a difference. The NRB wants to acknowledge these facts.

Nonetheless it is the hurt and wounds of thousands of historical cases that victim survivors are now reporting years later that we still must attend to. It is the lessons that we have learned in reviewing the few current matters and the larger numbers of historical cases that we must perfect and put sound practices in place to minimize the risk of such acts again. Focusing on learned lessons helps to restore trust and to create a culture of safety.

Bishops have been involved with child and youth protection since the beginning with the 2002 *Charter*; some of you even longer; and then some like myself for nearly 15 years, 10 of which I

served as a Victims Assistance Coordinator. When I reflect on where we began in 2002 and where we are today in 2021, the process of “ever evolving” comes to my mind. While we have put safety measures in place to reduce the numbers of allegations, we still must address the pain of the numbers of victim survivors still hurting and just coming forward now. Our church’s response to healing and care for the victim survivors has surely evolved over the years and it still is evolving today, and it needs to continue to evolve tomorrow and into the future. We must focus on the areas of healing and reconciliation, accountability, transparency, and ongoing education for all involved in child and youth protection. You, as Bishops and Eparchs have made significant progress over the years. And sometimes, we can imagine that it may feel like it is never enough. However, as the pain of child abuse is lifelong, our efforts to heal, protect and restore trust will be lifelong.

It is true, as long as there is one victim survivor or child or vulnerable adult out there feeling hurt or abandoned, we must continue our primary commitment of healing as we stated in Article 1 of the Dallas *Charter* in 2002. I recently listened to a broadcast by Teresa Pitt Green, a survivor who addressed this body in 2018, who is a co-founder of Spirit Fire survivor ministry. She was speaking with Msgr. Stephen Rosetti, a psychologist and faculty member of the Catholic University of America. Msgr. Rosetti pointed out that reconciliation is a slow process. It is about establishing relationships with victim survivors and their families. Bishops, clergy, and laity coming to the table, sitting and talking with victim survivors while continuing to listen compassionately to build relationships. Msgr. Rosetti said, “we have not yet fulfilled our gospel mandate until we, the Church, become the voice of the voiceless victims”. The NRB encourages further expansion of our reconciliation efforts not only for victim survivors and their families but to the Catholic community at large. Since 2018 and 2019 there has been increased focus and expansion on responding to victim survivors by Church ministers, but we must evolve in our response to reach the community of people in the pews, the people who have left the pews and those who have yet to fill the pews as well as the clergy who have suffered from past failings of their brother clergy and been devastated by the crisis.

Improvement is warranted in the area of accountability as measured by our annual audits. It has been the goal of the NRB for years to keep evaluating and implementing new means by which to strengthen the audit process and improve the level of compliance. We have not reached our commitment to the *Charter* until we have 100% participation from all dioceses and eparchies. For those of you who reached beyond the *Charter* mandates and implemented parish audits, we commend your efforts. This year’s audit indicates that 35% of dioceses did not have a formalized parish audit program in place. For those who have not already done so, we maintain that instituting parish audits is good risk management and demonstrates unwavering commitment to a culture of safety. Additionally, the NRB highly recommends dioceses and eparchies to go a step further to implement the principles of High Reliable Organizations. The SCYP is in its second year of training 21 dioceses and 1 eparchy on these risk management techniques which can be applied in every office and not just in child protection. Reach out to the Secretariat office and arrange a training for yourself and your staff.

The NRB applauds the implementation of the Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting service (CBAR) in response to Vos Estes Lux Mundi and we can see instances of its success. However, the NRB recognizes and recommends the need for the CBAR service to also be audited to ensure all matters are being handled according to proper standards.

Transparency is another area that the NRB focuses on. For those who have gone beyond specific *Charter* requirements in this and other areas, thank you! Publishing lists of clerics with substantiated allegations and making sure that lists include diocesan, religious order, or eparchial clergy, whether they are alive, dead, or otherwise removed from ministry are but one means of communicating to survivor victims that ‘we hear you’. The victim survivor community has been clamoring for full disclosure of all such clergy for years and we have a long way to go to be as transparent as possible in this area. One victim survivor, I personally worked with waited for 6 years to have her abuser be listed. She questioned why her experience was less important than any other victim survivor just because the accused was deceased and a religious order priest. That was her specific need for justice. The NRB encourages you to look at such lists as exemplary models of transparency. And when your diocese communicates an allegation, it is important to remember that during the course of an investigation we must treat the alleged victim survivor as well as the accused, with measures in place that reflect the commitment in Article 1 of the *Charter*, for accompaniment and assistance to the victim survivor, until the matter is resolved.

Education, as in all areas of academic study, has evolved in child and youth protection and in providing care to survivors. Anyone who meets with survivors including bishops, clergy, lawyers, investigators, VACs or SECs should be aware of trauma focused therapy principles.

This presentation is the first opportunity for the NRB to share with you our thoughts on the Theodore McCarrick report that was release in November 2020. The NRB made a statement in December 2020 on the McCarrick Report which is available on the USCCB website under the NRB page. The NRB is presently collaborating with the CPCYP on key learnings from that report and others, including the systemic reporting failures; not putting the child or vulnerable adult in the center of every action; manipulation by offender; instituting fraternal correction; and the handling of anonymous reports. Accountability is also measured in Vos Estes and CBAR. While the NRB did not support the metropolitan model, we are grateful that in the case of McCarrick the process initiated by the Archdiocese of New York worked. What we have in place, works!

In conclusion, the NRB thanks you and encourages you to continue the progress being made in using the expertise of lay Catholics. We are aware that some of our recommendations go beyond the specific requirements of the *Charter* and that many of you already minister at that level. But that is essential to what we all must do and is necessary to minimize risk or harm while restoring trust in a moral and just manner. In Catholic teaching, we are not biblical literalists therefore we may want to evolve beyond being *Charter* literalists. We look forward to our continued

collaboration with the Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People and the body of bishops. We pray that all of our collaborative work is centered on the gospel of healing.

Thank you!