



National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People

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2017 Progress Report to the Body of Bishops

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“It happened five years ago. Trembling, I entered into the office of my bishop. The fifty year old person that I was kept repeating to myself that all would go well; the 13 and a half year old child that I had been was yelling at me to get out of there, that being alone with a priest was dangerous. I quickly told my bishop the reason for my visit: ‘I am coming to try and reconcile with the Church.’ The big smile with which he had greeted me changed into a grave face. I said, ‘When I was a child, I was abused by a priest.’ I read the pain on his face. He was the first person in the Church who did not remain aloof or embarrassed in front of my words. His sensitivity touched me. Since then, his accompaniment and his listening have repaired me.”

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. My opening words today were not my own. They were the words of a survivor of child sexual abuse by a trusted priest. Her words remind us of the importance of keeping your commitment to addressing the issue of the sexual abuse of minors by the clergy at the forefront of your ministry and why you have allowed me to speak with you this morning on behalf of the National Review Board - for which I am grateful. This morning I wish to explore with you how to continue to best carry out the “Promise to Protect, Pledge to Heal” you have made to the faithful, and especially to survivors of sexual abuse by clergy.

For the last 15 years, you have held yourselves accountable to your promise and pledge by submitting to an external audit of your dioceses’ methods of implementing the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. As you know, the findings of the audit are published in the public *Annual Report* and illustrate both the strengths and weaknesses in creating cultures of protection and healing in your dioceses. I encourage you and your staff to read the report that is available online at USCCB.org and will be sent to each of your dioceses.

In reviewing the results of this past year's audit, I am happy to report that there was an increase in the number of dioceses/eparchies participating in the audit, almost achieving 100% participation in the audit process. Whereas there were six dioceses or eparchies that did not participate in 2015, only two did not participate last year. All dioceses and eparchies intend on participating in the audit this coming year.

This is a hopeful sign that the goal of full participation in the audit will be attained during the next audit cycle, which will demonstrate the commitment of the entire episcopate to the

protection of children and compliance with the *Charter*. The value and importance of the participation of every diocese/eparchy in the audit cannot be overemphasized if the faithful are to be confident in the leadership of the bishops in doing everything possible to prevent the sin and crime of clerical sexual abuse of minors in the Church.

The rate of compliance with the *Charter* is also positive. Of the sixty-five dioceses and eparchies that participated in the on-site audit process this year, two dioceses were found to be non-compliant with respect to one article, and one eparchy was found to be non-compliant with respect to two articles. In addition, one hundred and twenty-nine dioceses completed a data collection survey on their actions and efforts to implement the *Charter* provisions.

Based on more detailed information obtained from the auditor from the 2016 audit, it appears that some dioceses just meet the minimum requirements of the *Charter*, while other dioceses go beyond the minimum requirements of the *Charter*. These dioceses go above the *Charter* in an effort to more fully protect children and young people from abuse and harm, to ensure that allegations of abuse are appropriately processed and that survivors of abuse are compassionately supported on their path to healing. The National Review Board commends the bishops for their efforts in striving to establish cultures of protection and healing throughout the entire Church. Because of your efforts, victim assistance and child and youth protection are both permanent ministries within the Church. Anyone who has been abused by a member of the clergy can turn to the Church for support and healing. The safety of children and youth in our parishes and schools has become a main focus for the Church and its leadership.

While the audit shows that you have accomplished a great deal, there is still much to be done. One of the National Review Boards' greatest concerns is the reluctance of dioceses to include parish audits as part of the audit process. If safe environments are to be established, it is critical that parishes are in compliance with the *Charter* and diocesan policies. Without parish audits, it is difficult to know with confidence that policies and procedures related to the *Charter* are being implemented and carried out at all levels of the diocese, especially in parishes and schools where abuse can actually take place.

According to the audit, less than half of dioceses are including their parishes in our audit during their on-site visits. The number of dioceses that included parish audits during the on-site audit decreased this year from 31 dioceses last year to 23 dioceses this year. The number of dioceses utilizing the optional audit survey provided by the auditor also decreased. Of the 194 dioceses/eparchies that participated in the audit process this year, only 85 indicated that they perform parish audits regularly and 22 do so "as needed."

While the National Review Board acknowledges that several bishops do conduct parish audits in some form, it is a concern that the importance and necessity of including parish audits has not been more fully embraced. Knowledge of and compliance with diocesan policies and procedures that flow from the *Charter* can only be truly verified through the audit of parishes. The National Review Board strongly encourages more dioceses to adopt a more thorough oversight over their

parishes regarding child and youth protection, including the use of internal or external parish audits.

The National Review Board is also concerned with the lack of up-to-date policies and procedures being utilized in some dioceses. Dioceses and eparchies need to regularly review their policies to ensure that they are up to date and reflect changes that have been made in past revisions of the *Charter*, especially related to proper use of technology, including e-mail, or social media. It is particularly important to undertake such a review when a new bishop is appointed to a diocese.

Despite the implementation of the *Charter*, there were still 25 allegations reported in 2016 by current minors. While this number may indicate that progress has been made in addressing this issue, we know that as a result of delayed disclosure, this number does not reflect the actual reality at the present time. In fact, hundreds of new allegations regarding abuse that occurred in prior years are still being reported each year to dioceses.

The sexual abuse of minors by the clergy is not a thing of the past nor a distant memory. Any allegation involving a current minor should remind all of us to re-dedicate ourselves each day to maintaining a level of vigilance that will not permit complacency to set in or result in a less precise and thorough implementation of the *Charter*.

Efforts must consistently be made to improve on what your dioceses have learned over the last 15 years of experience since the *Charter* was promulgated and the audit was established. While both the *Charter* and the audit have been very effective tools for dioceses and eparchies to improve their prevention and response plans, continuous improvement is essential to help reduce risk. Based on the number of allegations that continue to be received, as well as a number of scandals that have emerged since the implementation of the *Charter*, it is clear that our current methods are not perfect.

For these reasons, the National Review Board remains firmly committed to assisting the bishops in finding concrete and meaningful improvements to both the audit and the *Charter*.

Since 2011, your dioceses have utilized Stonebridge Business Partners to carry out the audit process. Stonebridge will continue to serve as your auditor through the year 2020. Stonebridge has changed the principal auditor, or the individual responsible for carrying out the audit in dioceses, for the next three audit years. This is a standard institutional practice to maintain transparency. In fact, public companies in the United States are required to rotate their principal auditor every five years. While the USCCB is not required to do so, the rotation of principal auditor will help to ensure audit objectivity and provide fresh insights and recommendations to your dioceses.

Rotating the principal auditor is one effective way to protect the integrity of the independent audit process. To continue to maintain the independence of the audit, members of the National Review Board will be working with bishops from the Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People to form a joint work-group that will focus on the audit. The goal of this work-group will be to determine how the audit can be improved for enhanced effectiveness, as well as researching other potential auditing firms for the next audit cycle. While StoneBridge has provided professional guidance and helpful recommendations to dioceses for six years, studying the alternatives of either an enhanced or different auditing tool or a new auditing firm will only improve the quality and objectivity of the audit.

The ability of the audit to improve diocesan methods to protect and heal is only as effective as the *Charter* itself. For this reason, the National Review Board has also made recommendations to improve the *Charter* during its participation in the revision process over the last four years. Many of these recommendations address what the NRB views as a lack of specificity in the *Charter* that can be the source of unnecessary problems for the bishops. The Board firmly believes addressing this lack of specificity will assist the bishops in effectively carrying out their pastoral duties to prevent abuse and appropriately respond to allegations and survivors of abuse. The Board encourages the following recommendations which the NRB made during the last four years as participants in the current revision process to be continually considered by the bishops as potential revisions to the *Charter*:

Regarding allegations being brought to diocesan review boards, article 2 of the *Charter* currently states, “this board is to advise the diocesan/eparchial bishop in his assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors and in his determination of a cleric’s suitability for ministry.” The NRB unanimously believes that the *Charter*, or at a minimum, each diocesan policy, should further specify that “all allegations involving minors of sexual abuse of minors by clergy should be reported to diocesan review boards.” In reading grand jury reports from jurisdictions where this was not the diocesan practice, it is evident that this contributed to the devastating crisis that unfolded within those particular dioceses. In our view, bringing all allegations to the review board will allow for greater transparency and provide the bishop with the necessary guidance that can prevent a situation which can lead to problems resulting in all decisions being made by a sole individual.

Regarding the use of diocesan review boards, article 2 of the *Charter* also currently states the board is to “regularly review diocesan/eparchial policies and procedures for dealing with sexual abuse of minors.” The NRB strongly believes that diocesan review boards should meet at least once annually. If there are no allegations, the review board can assist with policy reviews, review the Annual Report issued after each audit cycle to learn about best practices, or assess past cases in order to provide valuable feedback on child and youth protection within the diocese. If, as has been the case in some dioceses, diocesan review boards are not meeting at least annually the diocese opens itself up to unnecessary risk.

Regarding transparency, article 7 of the *Charter* currently states “Dioceses/eparchies are to be open and transparent in communicating with the public about sexual abuse of minors by clergy within the confines of respect for the privacy and the reputation of the individuals involved. This is especially so with regard to informing parish and other church communities directly affected by the sexual abuse of a minor.” The NRB firmly believes that diocesan policies should clearly define what “open and transparent communication to the public regarding allegations of abuse” entails in order to help the public recognize the Church’s seriousness in responding to allegations, thereby restoring trust.

At the time that the *Charter* was first drafted and implemented, the issue of boundary violations was not addressed in detail and not included. Since that time, reports of boundary violations have been on the increase. While not rising to the level of sexual abuse, boundary violations can be a warning sign that if left unchecked could result in sexual abuse. The NRB is convinced that addressing boundary violations should be incorporated into the *Charter*. However, until this occurs, this should be codified in every diocesan policy.

The *Charter* is silent on how to address the difficulties regarding the ongoing supervision and monitoring of permanently removed clerics who have not been laicized. There are examples of

ways in which some dioceses have addressed this issue successfully. The NRB encourages bishops to familiarize themselves with these examples as a way of addressing this issue.

The *Charter* is also silent on parish audits. As stated earlier, auditing parishes is the only means of ensuring that the implementation of the *Charter* is successful at the local level. While some dioceses do conduct or allow for parish audits, they do so voluntarily. The NRB strongly believes that the *Charter* needs to include the requirement of parish audits, either conducted internally by the diocese or externally as part of the on-site audit. Such a requirement would be a means of ensuring the accountability of those who serve in parishes and schools, where abuse can occur, in implementing diocesan policies and procedures.

While some of these recommendations may sound familiar, the NRB continues to keep them at the forefront since they remain as concerns in some dioceses based on the audits.

In an effort to assist the bishops to improve their methods for both implementing the *Charter* and strengthening their overall diocesan strategies to protect and heal, the National Review Board is also excited to announce two new resources available for dioceses and eparchies.

First, the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection, in consultation with the National Review Board, has published a resource toolbox to assist your diocesan staff in improving their implementation of the *Charter*. Fifty-six dioceses have contributed hundreds of materials to be included in the toolbox and shared with other dioceses. The toolbox features resources on twenty-nine topics including liturgies for healing, formation, background screening, responding to allegations, and general policies and procedures. It is a private and secure way dioceses can share their experiences with one another to continually update and improve their ability to protect and heal. All dioceses have been notified of the availability of the toolbox. I encourage you to remind your safe environment and victim assistance staff to utilize this important new resource which can be found on the online CYP community website.

Second, in collaboration with the National Review Board, the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection is developing a training program for clergy and diocesan staff whose responsibilities include the protection of minors. This training, based on the safety principles used by organizations like hospitals and nuclear industries, also known as High Reliability Organizations or HROs, will be made available to dioceses to assist them in strengthening their organizational methods of preventing and responding to abuse. The training will be tailored to the needs of each specific individual diocese and aims to ensure their own diocesan policies are implemented in the most effective way. For example, one aspect of the training will utilize a “simulated scenario” in which the diocese will go through the process of handling an allegation as if it was happening in “real-time.”

By using the principles and practices of HROs explained in the training, dioceses will be given the tools to create a true culture of protection and healing in the spirit of the *Charter*. The training will also help dioceses discover and implement the most effective practices used by other diocesan leaders throughout the nation. Nine dioceses have already volunteered to receive the training this Fall, in order to provide feedback on the training before it is shared with others. We look forward to updating your dioceses on the progress of this training in the future.

Earlier this year, on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, the Holy Father exhorted bishops to protect the most vulnerable, and to listen to the cries of children who suffer. Today, the National Review Board shares in the words of encouragement of Pope Francis to ask you to “find the courage

needed to take all necessary measures and to protect in every way the lives of our children.” We call on you to continue to listen and accompany the survivors of abuse you meet, to be sensitive to the needs of the faithful, and to courageously defend the most vulnerable in the Church.

On behalf of the National Review Board, I thank you for the privilege and opportunity to address you today. We are grateful for your continued leadership in confronting one of the most pressing challenges presently facing not only the Church, but society as a whole. Thanks to your commitment to your Promise to Protect and Pledge to Heal, dioceses in the United States are among the safest places for children and serve as examples for the rest of the world, both religious and secular. We will continue to pray for you as you carry out your ministries to the faithful.

The survivor of abuse with whose words I opened my report found her path to healing by leaning on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and remaining close to Christ. Her faith in God made her believe the irreparable could be repaired. May we carry her experiences with us as we continue to strive for complete healing and justice within the Church. Thank you.