



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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BACKGROUND EVALUATIONS

How do dioceses and eparchies evaluate the background of clergy, employees, and volunteers who work with children?

Dioceses/eparchies are to utilize the resources of law enforcement and other community agencies to evaluate backgrounds. Individual states have different rules for non-criminal justice agencies to access criminal history records so there is not just one way to do this. Dioceses/eparchies need to work with local law enforcement officials to determine the best course of action.

Who evaluates the results of the background investigation and determines if the individual is suitable for work or volunteering with children?

Supervisory personnel within a diocese or eparchy evaluate the results of the background investigation to determine one's fitness for ministry in the Church or around children. A set of criteria should list what are unacceptable offenses that would disqualify a person from church employment or volunteer service.

How often do background checks have to be done?

Because someone could be arrested for a crime at anytime, background checks will need to be redone if the person remains an employee or volunteer. The bishop will need to determine the appropriate interval of time. Many dioceses/eparchies are choosing to do them every 3-5 years.



CHARTER FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

What is the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*?

The *Charter* is a comprehensive set of procedures established by the USCCB in June, 2002 for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. The *Charter* also includes guidelines for reconciliation, healing, accountability, and prevention of further acts of abuse.

What, if anything, does it replace?

The development of the *Charter's* principles is built on the work of the Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse in the mid 1990's and their development of the document entitled "Restoring Trust." During 2000-2001, the Ad Hoc Committee shifted their focus to education, prevention, and review of diocesan policies for child safe environments. Meetings with victims and victim advocacy groups were conducted and the "Restoring Trust" materials were incorporated and further developed into the document now known as the *Charter*.

Who drafted the *Charter*?

The *Charter* was drafted by eight members of the Bishops' Ad Hoc committee on Sexual Abuse, two individuals who are experts in treating sexual abusers, and two lay people, one of whom was a victim of abuse himself.

How do parishes make the *Charter* available?

A full copy of the *Charter* is available for download from the USCCB Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection [website](#). The *Charter* has been published in diocesan newspapers and websites and through special bulletins. You can also order copies from USCCB Publishing.

Who is a minor in the *Charter's* view?

In both civil and canon law a minor is anyone under the age of 18. Until 1994, under Canon Law, a minor was considered any person under the age of 16. In 1994, Canon Law was changed for dioceses/eparchies of the USCCB so that anyone under the age of 18 was considered to be a minor. In 2001, it changed for the universal church.

Has the Church in the United States ever enacted a uniform policy such as this?

In the past, the Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse formulated and recommended sexual abuse policies that were geared to combat sexual abuse by clergy. They were Restoring Trust Vol. I (1993), Restoring Trust Vol. II (1995), and Restoring Trust Vol. III (1996). Many dioceses instituted changes based on these policies; however, there was not universal adoption throughout the country. The *Charter* is the first comprehensive policy that all bishops have agreed to implement throughout the United States.

What if the abuse occurred prior to the enactment of the *Charter*?

Any act of sexual abuse of a minor which occurred prior to the *Charter* being implemented but is brought forward now, will be considered relevant and subject to the *Charter*. The *Charter* pertains to acts of abuse in the past, present, and future.



Does the *Charter* address due process for the accused?

The *Charter* states that "for the sake of due process, the accused is to be encouraged to retain the assistance of civil and canonical counsel."

How is compliance with the *Charter* monitored?

In June 2003, the Office (now Secretariat) of Child and Youth Protection began an audit process of all dioceses and eparchies throughout the United States. The audit is used to determine if the diocese is implementing the practices required by the *Charter*. An *Annual Report on the Implementation of the Charter* is prepared by the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection. Additional information may be found on the USCCB Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection [website](#).

How does the *Charter* affect the religious orders of men?

The Conference of Major Superiors of Men participates in the implementation of the *Charter* in each religious order. The *Charter* requires that bishops consult with the superiors of religious orders in their dioceses.

CLERGY

I am a parish priest. I am afraid I will be accused of abuse if I hug or even talk to a child. How is this helping me do my job?

The solution to preventing child sexual abuse is educating caring, committed adults. Training does not say adults cannot hug or be around children. It asks that our behavior be distinctly different from that of offenders, and that we know the warning signs of abuse. Being with children is not an indicator of child abuse. Be sure to check your diocesan code of conduct for more information and guidance.

What does the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* require parishes to do?

The parishes are critical to the implementation of the *Charter*. It is there that most of the abuse occurred, and it is there that most of the prevention can be done. Parishes need to train all clergy, employees, and volunteers with regular contact with children. This is so we can be reasonably sure that people who **should not** be around children **are not** around children. All parish employees and volunteers need to have their background checks evaluated for suitability. We would not hire someone found guilty of embezzlement to do our accounting; in the same way, we would not want someone who has committed crimes against children to be in any of our programs. All dioceses have policies and procedures in place that parishes are to follow. Contact your Safe Environment Coordinator to find out how it is done in your diocese.

I do not know who my volunteers are. How are we supposed to know that? We are too big a parish.

Child sexual abusers seek out ways to be around children. They are often very socially gifted, charming people. Adults need to protect children from these people. The only way we can do that is by knowing who is around our children. The simplest way to get a handle on volunteers is to



start compiling a list in a spreadsheet or other document. List the names of people as they volunteer, whether or not they have been trained, and when or if they have had a background check. The *Charter* requires that all volunteers who have regular contact with children be trained and have their background evaluated for suitability. Keep working on the list until you are satisfied that all volunteers are on it. When parents realize this is to protect their children they usually become very supportive.

My pastor has been removed from ministry because of an abuse charge. The diocese has determined it is a credible allegation. I just can't believe someone as caring as he could do something like this. How can I get over this anger?

First of all, be honest with the anger. Realize that the anger can be both justified and healthy. Then find someone that you can talk to about the anger and all the other thoughts and feelings that come with it. Find a close friend or two that you can honestly talk with to deal with your feelings; not to retell the story of the pastor. Retelling the story about your pastor is not healthy for you or him; or the one you are speaking with. Rumination never brings about reconciliation. If you have a spiritual director (if not, find one) talk with him or her for your own healing and reconciliation. Pray for your pastor; it is very healing to pray for someone who has betrayed your trust and confidence. Pray for yourself, asking God's grace to move on in a healthy way.

CODE OF CONDUCT

What is a Code of Conduct for employees and volunteers?

A Code of Conduct identifies acceptable behavior that is legal, professional and responsible. It must include clear standards of ministerial behavior and appropriate boundaries for clergy, for any other paid personnel, and for volunteers in positions of trust who have regular contact with children and young people.

Is one Code of Conduct for everyone sufficient?

A diocese/eparchy can have one code of conduct for everyone or may have different codes for volunteers and employees as long as each one covers clear standards of behavior and appropriate boundaries.

Is there a Code of Conduct for children and youth?

There can be a code of conduct for children and youth that includes behaving appropriately and respecting the rights of others.

ESSENTIAL NORMS

What are the *Essential Norms*?

The *Essential Norms* are "particular" canon law for the bishops in the United States. The *Essential Norms* can be found on the USCCB Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection [website](#).



What is "particular" canon law?

Particular canon law is canon law which applies only to a certain group. In the case of the *Essential Norms*, this "particular law" applies to the Catholic bishops in the United States.

How do the *Essential Norms* relate to the Charter?

The *Essential Norms* make some of the elements of the *Charter* the law of the Church in the United States.

How is compliance with the *Essential Norms* ensured?

Non-compliance with the *Essential Norms* is subject to canonical penalty.

Does the compliance audit of the *Charter* include the *Essential Norms*?

No, only the implementation of the *Charter* is audited; however, some elements of the *Charter* are replicated in the *Essential Norms*.

NATIONAL REVIEW BOARD

What is the National Review Board?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops established the National Review Board during their meeting in June of 2002. The functions of the Board were revised slightly and reconfirmed in June of 2005 when the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* was revised (and later in 2010 and 2018). The purpose of the National Review Board is to advise the USCCB in preventing the sexual abuse of minors in the United States by persons in the service of the Church.

Functions of the National Review Board:

- Advise the Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People on matters of child and youth protection specifically on policies and practices.
- Review the work of the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection and make specific recommendations to its Director, assisting the Director in the development of resources for dioceses and eparchies.
- Oversee the completion and dissemination of the study of the causes and context of the recent crisis of sexual abuse in the Church, including periodic assessment of data and preliminary results during the course of this study.
- Review, prior to publication, the annual report of the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection on implementing and maintaining the standards of the *Charter* and any approval and publication to the Conference President.
- Advise the Conference President on future members of the Board and future Directors of the Office.
- Advise the Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People on the annual audit process prescribed in the *Charter*, including methods, scope, and personnel.



- Alert and inform the appropriate parties of concerns that emerge from the above responsibilities that may run counter to the spirit of the *Charter*.
- Consult, as requested, with the Conference President, the Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People, the Administrative Committee, and other USCCB or relevant Church entities on matters relating to the protection of children and young people from sexual abuse.
- Make appropriate recommendations to prevent sexual abuse of minors.

When was it started?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops established the National Review Board during their meeting in June of 2002.

To whom does the National Review Board report?

The Board makes recommendations to the President of the USCCB and the USCCB Executive Committee.

Does the Board conduct investigations of sexual abuse?

The Board does not conduct investigations into specific incidents of sexual abuse.

Does the Board have the authority to remove a priest or deacon from ministry?

The Board does not have the authority to remove a cleric from ministry. It is the responsibility of the bishop to remove a priest or deacon from ministry when appropriate.

Does the Board interact with diocesan review boards throughout the United States?

There is generally no direct contact between the National Review Board and diocesan review boards. The functions of the National Review Board and the Diocesan Review Board are different in scope. The *Charter* requires that each bishop establish his own diocesan review board. The diocesan review boards are primarily concerned with examining instances of sexual abuse by a cleric and offering advice to the bishop on such cases. The National Review Board's mandate is broader in scope, dealing with national policy issues, studies, recommendations to the body of Bishops and interaction with the Bishops' Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection.

What is the *Report of the Crisis in the Catholic Church in the United States*?

This Report was prepared by the National Review Board as a result of interviews conducted by members of the Board. The Report is intended to inform the public as to possible reasons for the crisis of abuse to have occurred and to provide a framework or a more comprehensive study on the causes and contest of the abuse crisis.



What was the purpose of the 'nature and scope' study?

The Nature and Scope Study is a descriptive research project that depicts the extent of clergy abuse by Catholic priests and deacons within the United States. The study covers the time period from 1950 through 2002.

What is the purpose of the study of the 'causes and context' of the crisis of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy?

This study identifies causes of incidents of abuse by Catholic clergy and the circumstances surrounding the abuse from which preventative measures can be taken to prevent future offenses from occurring.

How does their work help protect children?

The National Review Board in its advisory role can bring a unique perspective on matters pertaining to the protection of children and young people from child sexual abuse by anyone in service to the Church. They are a consultative board and can voice concerns that emerge from their responsibilities.

Who is on the Board?

Click on this [link](#) to view the members of the National Review Board:

Who appoints members to the Board?

Members of the Board are appointed by the President of the USCCB in consultation with the Administrative Committee.

When do they meet?

The board meets four times a year.

Do Board members receive a salary?

The Board members do not receive a salary.

How can the National Review Board be contacted?

The National Review Board can be contacted by writing to Dr. Francesco Cesareo, Chair, USCCB National Review Board, c/o the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection, 3211 Fourth St. NE Washington, DC 20017

PARENTS

What should I do if I suspect my child has been abused?

Call the police or social services department in your community. Reassure your child that he/she did nothing wrong and that he/she did the right thing by telling you. You may want to find a child counselor experienced in child abuse matters. Call the victim assistance person in your diocese.



My child came home and told about being shown pornography. What should I do?

Call the police. There is no good reason for an adult to share pornography with children. Assure your child that they are not in trouble, that they did the right thing by telling you. If necessary, help them process the experience by talking about your feelings toward pornography and why it is wrong. If the child was shown pornography at school, let school officials know about it as well. Call the victim assistance person in your diocese.

I get the 'creeps' from one of the volunteers at Church. He always has his hands-on kids in one way or another. What should I do?

Listen to your 'gut.' Offenders give warning signs that knowledgeable adults can use; your 'gut' often picks them up. You are not accusing someone of abuse you are communicating your concern about inappropriate behavior. Let the diocesan/eparchial victim assistance or safe environment coordinator know of your concerns. Let the supervisor of the program know of them as well. Keep reporting your concerns until someone hears you. Your courage to report those types of incidents may be very helpful. Reporting can let the person know their behavior is unacceptable, and it lets them know they are being watched. If it is poor judgment, this gives the person the opportunity to change the behavior.

Why do I have to be trained? I did not do anything wrong; this is a clergy problem.

Child sexual abuse is a widespread societal problem, not a Catholic clergy problem. The more people who are trained to recognize the warning signs of an offender, the safer our children are. In the aftermath of the clergy scandal, the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* requires the Church to train both adults and children to prevent child sexual abuse. This is not because the Church thinks all adults are the problem. It is because the solution to preventing child sexual abuse depends on caring adults knowing what to do.

My children are too young to hear this. Aren't you destroying the 'innocent period' of their development?

Teaching children about boundaries and safe touches is not sex education. There are many safety issues we teach children: bike safety, water safety, fire prevention, driver's training, etc. Personal safety programs should have age appropriate lessons that give children the skills they need to protect themselves without frightening them. Keeping children unaware of the dangers around them does not keep them safe. Predators count on children not knowing what to do.

I believe morality should be taught in the home, not in school. Does my child have to attend these training classes?

You are right, morality is best taught in the home, but this is personal safety training, not morality class and not sex education. Catholic moral theology compels us to keep children safe. Parents are the primary educators of their children, and those who do not want their children to participate in the school/religious education portion of the training may opt out. They should still receive the parent portion of the training for assistance in how to teach their children to be safe.



SAFE ENVIRONMENT

What are dioceses/eparchies doing for Safe Environment training?

Each diocese/eparchy is free to choose a Safe Environment training program that meets the needs of that particular diocese or eparchy. Many have developed their own programs, and many have purchased a training program from vendors. Training programs are to be established for employees, clergy, volunteers, and children.

Who needs to be trained?

The *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* requires dioceses and eparchies to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, volunteers and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children and young people.

What are the Catholic Church's teachings regarding child sexual abuse?

The Catholic Church teaches that the "human body shares in the dignity of the image of God" (CCC364). That dignity leads us to foster in every person the belief and awareness that as a person of God they are deserving of love and respect. Dignity is a gift given by God at birth. Abuse of all kind is harmful to that dignity. Children being among the most vulnerable require us to protect that dignity.

How long will our diocese/eparchy need to do safe environment training?

Child sexual abuse is a pervasive societal problem. Dioceses should consider the creation of safe environment programs and preventing child sexual abuse as something we do as part of who we are as the Church. Dioceses and eparchies have been required to meet Safe Environment expectations since 2003 and should plan on meeting those expectations for the foreseeable future.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT TRAINING FOR CHILDREN

My catechists are uncomfortable teaching this. What can I do?

It is understandable that teaching something like this can cause concern. No one wants to think about something this horrible, but all adults are responsible for protecting children. Be sure to provide training for the catechists and review the lessons with the catechists prior to the lesson. If the catechist is still not comfortable teaching this, the pastor, DRE, or another catechist should be sought to teach this particular lesson.

My catechists are concerned they will not know what to do if a child discloses abuse to them.

That is a common fear and training in this area is very effective. We do not investigate, we report. Catechists and/or the Director of Religious Education should know how to report suspected child abuse in their city or county. Adults need to remember this is about protecting children. All they need to do is hear what the child is telling them and do what is necessary to protect the child.



VICTIMS

I was abused by a priest when I was young. Can something be done to help me now?

Yes. What happened to you was wrong and a crime. It was not your fault. You are encouraged to call the police to report the crime. You are also encouraged to report the abuse to the diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator. Find the name and phone number of that person at this [link](#), or call the Secretariat for Child and Youth Protection at 202-541-5413 to help you find the right person to call. You can get help and healing for the pain you have suffered.

The offending person is deceased. Can I still get help?

Yes, call the Victim Assistant Coordinator in your diocese. They can help you get started. Find the name and phone number of that person at this [link](#), or call the Secretariat for Child and Youth Protection at 202-541-5413 to help you find the right person to call. You can get help and healing for the pain you have suffered.

I do not want to report it to the police. I reported it earlier and no one believed me. I do not want to go through that again. If I report it to the diocese, do I have to make a police report?

You are not required to report past abuse to the police, but you are encouraged to do so. There are many reasons someone might not want to report to the police. However, the Church still wants to know about any incidents of cleric abuse. Please report it to the diocese even if you do not want to report it to the police. The Church is required to report all abuse that has happened to a minor.