

How the Diocese of Rockville Centre Has Been Addressing Child Protection and the Clergy Abuse Scandal



The sexual abuse of minors is a horrifying sin and a crisis in our society at large. Even one instance of the abuse of a child by a member of the clergy is far too many. However, it is a **myth** that the abuse crisis only exists in the Catholic Church. It is also a **myth** that the Church has done nothing to address this problem.

This does not diminish the shame of what occurred in the Church in the past. But, if we fail to see and deal with the reality of the sexual abuse of minors across all levels of society: in schools, hospitals, institutions, all religious and secular organizations, and especially in families, then we will fail in our duty to truly protect all children.

What does the Diocese do to protect children?

- **All accusations of abuse** (whether credible or not) made against any member of the clergy, employee or volunteer, are promptly reported to the district attorney's office, regardless of when the abuse may have occurred. **This policy has been in place since 2003 in the Diocese of Rockville Centre.**
- **The diocese has released the names of all** clergy, employees and volunteers that we are aware of having ever been accused of the sexual abuse of a minor (whether credible or not) to the proper law enforcement authorities.
- All priests, deacons, diocesan and parish employees, and volunteers are **background screened**.
- All priests, deacons, diocesan and parish employees and volunteers are required to attend the **VIRTUS** course: *Protecting God's Children*. Offered in multiple languages, these classes are designed to **educate** everyone in the Church on the **prevention of child sexual abuse**, making participants aware of the signs of abuse, the methods used by offenders to commit abuse, and steps used to prevent such abuse.
- Children attending parish faith formation programs are taught safety awareness through the program: *Think First & Stay Safe: Child Lures Prevention*. Youth enrolled in diocesan elementary and high schools receive safety awareness training beginning with nursery school and continuing throughout high school.
- Rigorous **psychological screening** is done for all men discerning **vocations to the priesthood**, and this continues throughout the five-year period of seminary formation. In addition, all seminarians receive training in diocesan child protection policies.
- **Codes of Conduct** have been published and mandated for all clergy, employees, volunteers and youth, to clearly define what is and what is not acceptable when interacting with children and young adults.
- In **2003**, the Diocese of Rockville Centre established an **Office for the Protection of Children and Young People**. This Office works collaboratively with other Diocesan offices to ensure the safety and well-being of children, youth and vulnerable adults.
- A longstanding **Diocesan Review Board (DRB)**, comprised mostly of lay men and women with expertise in the fields of psychiatry, law enforcement, jurisprudence, psychology and expertise in sexual abuse of minors/child protection, functions as a consultative body advising the Bishop. The DRB helps in the assessment of reports of sexual abuse of minors and advises the Bishop in the determination of the cleric's suitability for ministry.
- Since the inception of audit reviews in 2003, the Diocese has participated in 14 audits and found to be in compliance with standards as outlined in the **Charter for the Protection of Children & Young People** for each audit period.

What does the Diocese do for victim survivors of child sexual abuse?

- The Office for the Protection of Children and Young People has a three-fold mission:
 - To **promote healing and reconciliation** with the victim/survivors of sexual abuse of minors
 - To **ensure the protection** of the faithful for the future
 - To **ensure the accountability** of our procedures
- We have a dedicated phone line for reporting abuse **(516)594-9063**. All allegations are responded to within 24 hours of the report. Outreach to the victim survivor is initiated, **counseling assistance** is offered to survivors and, when appropriate, to family members; and a determination is made regarding the necessity of additional support services.
- The Diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator is available for the immediate pastoral care of persons who report having been sexually abused as a minor by anyone working for the Church.
- In 2017, the Diocese of Rockville Centre initiated the **Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program (IRCP)** to offer an opportunity for some measure of healing and justice to those who were abused by diocesan clergy. The IRCP program allows survivors of clergy sexual abuse to file confidential claims and receive financial compensation. **It continues** to offer survivors a confidential option for reconciliation. To date, 370 people have filed claims with our IRCP. The vast majority of claimants - 277 to be exact—have accepted compensation totaling just over \$50 million, with 75 – 80 claims still being processed. This program is currently ongoing.

Facts:

Independent analysis by John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University confirm that the vast majority of reported offenses took place between the 1960's and 1980's, then declined sharply. The allegations that we have received in the Diocese of Rockville Centre follow that same pattern.

Since the year 2015, **nationwide** there have been only 17 reported cases of current clerical sexual abuse in the Catholic Church as reported by CARA. In the Diocese of Rockville Centre during that same time there have been zero reports of a current incident of clergy sexual abuse. This shows that the efforts of the Catholic Church for many years now throughout the country, and in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, have been working.

The Work that Must Continue

The work of the Church – of administering the Sacraments, of preaching the Gospel, teaching, healing, advocating, serving, and ministering to the poor and vulnerable – can and must continue, despite the sins of the past.

The months and years ahead of us will require perseverance and prayer if we are to emerge as a Church even more dedicated to Christ's saving mission. We are reminded to turn to Mary our Mother and draw courage from the one who did not look away from her suffering Son. She waited patiently, suffered with him, and shared in his victory over sin and death.

This is the same Mary who, as Mother of the Church, gathered with the Apostles in the locked room, waiting for the power of the Holy Spirit to descend at Pentecost. As we enter a time of Paschal Mystery suffering, may Mary guide us, so that together we may continue to carry out the mission of her Son: the building up of the Kingdom of God throughout Long Island and the world.