



Communications Policy Regarding the Abuse of Minors

Roman Catholic Diocese of Erie

This Communications Policy is adopted in response to the commitment made by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in the 2002 and 2011 *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. This diocesan policy reflects a commitment to transparency and openness in a manner which respects the privacy and reputation of all persons involved in or affected by matters pertaining to sexual abuse of minors (USCCB *Charter*, Article 7).

The hallmark of a truly transparent and open policy is conducting church policies in the full light of public scrutiny. In order to accomplish this goal, the Diocese of Erie will promote the Charter for the *Protection of Children and Young People*, diocesan policies, programs and procedures so that the public can clearly and fairly judge our intent versus our performance.

The promotion of such efforts by the Diocese of Erie uses a number of outlets of communication with the Catholic community and the public, including the diocesan newsletter, *FaithLife*, the diocesan website at www.erieccd.org, the diocesan *Information Bulletin*, and various letters issued by the Diocesan Bishop or his delegate. Diocesan policies concerning the prevention and response to sexual abuse of minors by priests, deacons, and others who work or volunteer in the Church are already available to the public on the diocesan child protection website.

Likewise, the Diocese of Erie will communicate to clergy, religious and all members of the community the standards of conduct for priests, deacons and other persons in positions of trust and any information regarding safe environment programs (USCCB *Charter*, Articles 6, 12).

In the Event of an Allegation

The Diocese of Erie will comply with all applicable civil laws with respect to the reporting of sexual abuse of minor to the appropriate District Attorney or governmental agency and will cooperate in their investigation in accord with applicable law. The Diocese will cooperate with public authorities in cases where the alleged victim is no longer a minor. In every instance, the Diocese will advise and support a person's right to make a report to public authorities.

In keeping within the context of transparency and openness, the Diocese of Erie will communicate appropriately with the faithful of the Diocese and specifically with the members of the affected faith community, with the general public and the members of the media while observing the canonical responsibilities to protect the good reputation, rights and privacy of all persons involved and the common good of the Church. (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, cc 220, 223, 1717.2)

The Director of the Office of Communications is designated as the sole spokesperson and will provide information in a pastoral and timely manner to the general public and will coordinate all media contact.

Cases in Litigation

In order to protect the rights, reputation and integrity of all individuals and to ensure the veracity of the investigation, the case will be handled as confidentially as the circumstances allow. Only the Bishop, Vicar General, Chancellor, Victim Assistance Coordinator, Diocesan Review Board and Tribunal officials will have access to the information concerning the allegation. In the event that the allegation concerns a priest or deacon from another diocese, a member of a religious order or congregation, or an

employee or volunteer from another diocese or ecclesiastical organization, the appropriate superior or supervisor will be notified.

The Diocese will withhold public announcements regarding the case until the completion of the process. If an allegation becomes public knowledge, the Director of the Office of Communication will make no public comments other than to confirm that an allegation has been received, reported to proper authorities and is under investigation.

At the conclusion of the process, the Director of the Office of Communications will coordinate the announcement of the outcome, including any restriction to be placed upon the ministry/service of the accused or any steps to be taken to restore the accused to ministry/service and the restoration of that person's good name.

Supporting Communities Affected

The Diocese is committed to providing pastoral support of the faith communities affected by founded incidents of ministerial misconduct involving a minor. The Bishop will determine the specific pastoral outreach for the particular situation in consultation with the Diocesan Review Board, the Victim Assistance Coordinator, parish leadership or others as deemed appropriate.

The Diocese will provide information regarding services to bring about healing and reconciliation in a parish, school, institution or agency of the diocese to which anyone associated with the matter has a relationship.

Communication with Other Dioceses or Religious Communities

Whenever a priest or deacon of the Diocese of Erie, who has been permanently removed from all ministry because of the sexual abuse of a minor, wishes to reside in the territory of another diocese the Diocesan Bishop or his delegate shall notify the Bishop of the diocese in which that individual wishes to reside (USCCB, *Essential Norms*, 12).

Whenever a priest or deacon from another diocese or a member of a religious order or congregation wishes to transfer permanently or minister or be employed for a time in the Diocese of Erie, the Diocesan Bishop or his delegate shall first inquire from that individual's superior about his/her suitability for service in the Diocese of Erie. Most especially, it should be determined whether the individual has ever been accused of sexual abuse of minors (USCCB, *Essential Norms*, 12).

***Approved by the Diocesan Review Board
August 5, 2003
Erie, Pennsylvania***

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***Revised and Approved by the Diocesan Review Board
June 8, 2016***