

Our Path to Reconciliation and Healing

Diocese of San Jose

by Bishop Patrick J. McGrath

Recent news of abuse and misconduct in Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., and other places in the world has shaken our local community and eroded trust in the Church and its leadership. These events are horrific. We must review and, if necessary, renew our efforts to heal all victims and others affected by these crimes and sins, bring perpetrators to justice and preclude further abuse.

The Diocese of San Jose remains committed to the protection of children and vulnerable adults. The Diocese of San Jose has long undertaken significant initiatives to protect all with whom we have contact.

Here follows a brief timeline of the development of our policies for the protection of children and vulnerable adults, a summary of our systemic efforts to ensure a safe environment, and an outline of our response to accusations of abuse and misconduct that highlights these efforts.

In 2002, the Bishops of the United States approved the *Dallas Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. The *Charter* provides policies for dioceses of the United States to address incidents of abuse and facilitate a safe environment in our parishes, schools, and Catholic organizations, the places where we worship, gather, educate and serve. It includes procedures for reconciliation, healing, and accountability. The *Dallas Charter* was updated and strengthened in 2005, 2011, and 2018.

The Diocese of San Jose has adopted and implemented the *Dallas Charter*. We have also successfully undergone annual audits to ensure compliance and ongoing growth and development in our efforts of protection.

In 2002, the Diocese of San Jose established the Office for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults. This office oversees and coordinates the pastoral care and outreach to victims of clergy sexual abuse (as well as other victims who may have been abused within parishes or Catholic institutions – here or in other dioceses). This outreach and care include counseling, support groups, spiritual assistance, and other support services. Throughout the years, we have had the service of Victim Assistance Coordinators, who organize these efforts and accompany victims through their healing.

The independent Diocesan Review Board was established in 2002. This board evaluates any allegation of sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults by clergy (deacons, priests, and bishops), Church personnel or volunteers within the Diocese, even if civil authorities have chosen not to pursue legal action. The board also evaluates accusations of clergy sexual misconduct that point to possible violations of pastoral relationships.

Following its evaluation, the board advises the Bishop of San Jose regarding recommended action. The Diocesan Review Board is presently chaired by the Honorable Edward Panelli, a retired Associate Justice of the California Supreme Court, and includes other qualified lay persons and one pastor, as mandated by the *Dallas Charter*.

The Diocese of San Jose has ongoing programs to ensure screening and training of all clergy, diocesan employees, seminarians, and Church volunteers in Santa Clara County. All clergy,

seminarians, employees, and volunteers must be fingerprinted and undergo a background check before they can minister in the Diocese. Approximately 46,000 persons have been fingerprinted and undergone background screening since 2002.

Additionally, all clergy, employees and volunteers are required to undergo comprehensive “Safe Environment Training” every three years. The Office for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults coordinates and monitors this training. Over 46,000 persons have undergone safe environment training in the Diocese since 2002. We provide age-appropriate safe environment training in our schools and catechetical programs. Additionally, the Diocese requires that employees complete training regarding sexual harassment and workplace conduct every three years.

While important, training and background checks cannot prevent all misconduct. All clergy, school personnel, and pastoral ministers are mandated reporters in the State of California and must report any suspected abuse immediately. When we receive an accusation of sexual abuse, we notify civil authorities immediately. The Office for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults then notifies the Bishop, the Vicar General, and the Chair of the Diocesan Review Board.

The Diocese of San Jose cooperates fully with any investigation.

The victim’s safety and care are the primary concerns, and a Victim Assistance Coordinator is assigned to facilitate an immediate response to the victim and family and to coordinate ongoing care.

If the accusation is deemed “credible,” we remove the accused from ministry, pending the results of further investigation. Following the civil investigation and any legal action, the Diocese will pursue additional sanctions within the Church.

As a Diocese, we have adopted and exceeded national norms. Our churches and schools are much safer since the *Dallas Charter* was promulgated by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2002. Through the *Charter*, Catholic dioceses across the United States, including San Jose, have committed to conducting background checks for all persons who work with minors and vulnerable adults and to training minors and adults to recognize signs of abuse and of grooming by sexual predators.

Although we are not perfect, our efforts help ensure that our churches and schools in Santa Clara County are much safer.

The Diocese of San Jose remains committed to the protection of all persons to whom we minister, to the facilitation of safe and healthy parishes, schools, and organizations, and to healthy pastoral relationships that foster each person’s relationship with our loving God. To that end, we will continue to review our policies and procedures to learn if there are ways that we may improve our efforts on behalf of children, youth and all vulnerable persons.

Pope Francis has asserted that “We have realized that these wounds never disappear and that they require us forcefully to condemn these atrocities....” He continues, “The heart-wrenching pain of these victims, which cries out to heaven, was long ignored, kept quiet, or silenced.” He calls us to prayer and penance: “Penance and prayer will help us to open our eyes and our hearts to other people’s sufferings.”

We continue to do all that we can, through prayer and action, to promote reconciliation and healing for those who have suffered and to create a safe environment for every person.

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