

# Archdiocese passes child protection audit for 2018

The Archdiocese of Baltimore “has been found compliant with all audited Articles of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People for the 2017-18 audit period,” according to a letter to Archbishop William E. Lori from StoneBridge Business Partners, which conducts the audits on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The letter noted that the on-site audit included inquiry, observation and review of documents specifically requested from the archdiocese.

Ellen M. Heller, a retired judge who has been a member of the archdiocese’s Independent Review Board for 15 years, said she participated in the audit, answering questions from the auditors. She was asked if she had any suggestions as a member of the review board.

“I know they were quite serious,” she said of the auditors.

Although she said she was not aware of all the standards the audit seeks to review, she knows that the auditors speak to more than just members of the board and archdiocesan staff.

A member of the review board since 2004, shortly after the annual audits began, she said, “There has never been a result of the audit that indicated something that was not in compliance with the policy.”

Jerri Burkhardt, director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, said the audit “confirms that we are following the promises of the Charter.” In the Charter, each diocese promises to respond appropriately to allegations of abuse by reporting to the civil authorities, to hold the abusers accountable, and to protect children in the church’s care by properly screening and training employees and volunteers, she said.

In some years, the audit firm collects data from the archdiocese and in some years,

such as the one just completed, the firm conducts on-site visits, including meetings with key archdiocesan personnel in child protection, clergy personnel, school personnel, the chancellor and others, including rectors of the two seminaries in the archdiocese, parish personnel and members of the review board.

At the meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore in November, Francesco Cesareo, chairman of the National Review Board that advises the bishops on child protection issues, discussed points of the NRB's report to the bishops, which included suggestions to improve the effectiveness of the audit process.

Burkhardt said she is aware that some dioceses have been found in compliance but later concerns surfaced about those dioceses.

"When you have auditors visiting and they're asking for records and they're asking for backup documentation and they're asking to speak with all the people that you interface with, it doesn't feel like a really cozy relationship," the director of Child and Youth Protection said.

Heller noted that in her capacity on another board that used a law firm for an audit process not related to child sexual abuse, the audit was always OK. "We found out everything wasn't OK," she said. "So, I think that it's important to review every now and then the audit process."