



# Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church

## **Background**

*Following the 2002 revelation of widespread child sexual abuse in the Church, the US Bishops developed the Charter for the Protection of Children & Young People and the Essential Norms to ensure consistent and standard handling of abuse allegations by Church officials in the United States. The Charter and Norms require zero tolerance for all credible allegations and established policies around screening, background checks, safe environment training, selection and training of future priests as well as outreach to survivors of abuse.*

*Major steps were taken with the development of written child protection policies and the establishment of the Archdiocese's Independent Child Abuse Review Board in 1993. In 2002, the Archdiocese created an Office of Child and Youth Protection to assist in implementing the requirements of the Charter. Also, in September 2002, the Archdiocese of Baltimore released the names of all priests against whom a credible allegation of abuse had been made, dating back to the 1940s. This disclosure, among the first of its kind, was part of a letter sent by the Archbishop of Baltimore to every registered household in the Archdiocese and also included the amount of money expended on settlements and counseling for survivors. The list of abusive clergy was posted on the archdiocesan website and in the media. The list continues to be updated and is maintained on the child protection page of the archdiocesan website.*

## **What is the Church currently doing to keep children safe?**

The Archdiocese of Baltimore vigorously enforces the Charter and Norms by requiring criminal history screenings for all clergy, religious and employees and for all volunteers who work with children. As well, the Archdiocese requires all clergy, employees and any volunteer who has substantial contact with children to undergo mandatory safe environment training. Children in our schools and religious education programs also receive age-appropriate education that can help prevent abuse. The Archdiocese immediately reports all allegations of abuse and has a zero-tolerance policy, permanently barring from ministry anyone credibly accused of abuse. The Church participates in an independent audit of its compliance with the Charter and also conducts its own audit of parish and school files to ensure compliance with all child protection policies and safeguards.

## **How does the Church respond to an allegation of abuse?**

When the Archdiocese receives an allegation of abuse it immediately reports it to law enforcement, extends an offer of counseling to the survivor and removes the alleged abuser from ministry until credibility can be determined. Once given permission from law enforcement, the Archdiocese meets with the alleged victim and the accused and if the allegation is deemed credible, the perpetrator is permanently barred from ministry and placed on a "do not hire" list.

## **How are bishops held accountable?**

The Archdiocese of Baltimore supports calls for greater accountability for bishops and requires all bishops serving in the Archdiocese to sign and agree to adhere to the same Code of Conduct that applies to all priests and lay employees and volunteers. The Archdiocese clarified its child protection policy to make bishops subject to the same requirements as any other clergy. The Archdiocese participates in a national bishop reporting system administered by a third-party ([www.reportbishopabuse.org](http://www.reportbishopabuse.org)). The system helps insure that allegations involving bishops are reported to law enforcement and to the Vatican, which has authority over bishops.

## **How are lay people currently involved in the handling of abuse allegations?**

The Archdiocese consults with an Independent Review Board comprised almost entirely of lay professionals who review the Church's handling of all allegations of abuse. The members of the Independent Review Board, many of whom are non-Catholic, include current or retired judges, police chiefs, doctors, social workers, teachers, and others. The Board meets quarterly and is actively involved in overseeing the Church's compliance with the Charter and documents its work in an annual report. Further, archdiocesan leadership involved in decision-making and review of allegations of child sexual abuse consist largely of laity.

## **How does the Church help survivors of abuse?**

Anyone making a credible allegation of abuse against a representative of the Church is offered an apology, an opportunity to meet with the archbishop and counseling assistance with a counselor of their choosing, for as long as

it is helpful. Those survivors wishing to be in control of their own counseling arrangements are given the opportunity, along with their own attorney, to meet with a retired, non-Catholic judge who, after hearing from the survivor and representatives of the Church in a non-adversarial environment, will conduct a mediation leading to a monetary settlement for the survivor.

### **Does the Church limit counseling for survivors of abuse?**

No. The Church pays for counseling as long as appropriate, often for years. However, in circumstances where survivors choose mediation and receive a settlement, survivors acknowledge that the Church will no longer pay counselors for their therapy and that the money awarded them is to compensate them for the harm suffered by them and to cover any future counseling expenses.

### **Does my offertory donation to my parish or to archdiocesan campaigns fund settlements or abuse-related legal fees?**

Settlements, counseling assistance, and related legal costs are paid through the Archdiocese's insurance programs. The Archdiocese has operated a comprehensive insurance program for many years that provides a range of coverages including health, auto, workers' compensation, directors and officers, employment practices, property, casualty, and sexual misconduct. Locations pay premiums into the program at various rates for various coverages. The insurance program makes payments when claims arise either through third party carriers or from its own reserves for self-insured risks, with such reserves having been built up from investments and surpluses over decades of operations. Thus, for example if someone falls on the steps of the Cathedral and is injured or an earthquake causes cracks in the walls of the Basilica, the insurance program would cover associated medical costs and repairs. Coverage is also provided in connection with claims of sexual abuse including settlements and counseling assistance. It is certainly true that ultimately, many of the resources for what the Church does, including payments for insurance premiums, comes from the support of parishioners and other donors. At the same time, any connection between a parishioner donation and payment of insurance claims is very indirect--for example, most people would not think that the money a parishioner puts in the basket on Sunday goes to fix the Basilica walls damaged by an earthquake even though a very small part of that donation might be used for an insurance premium which provides coverage that includes an insurance company paying for the Basilica wall damage. Additional information on the Archdiocese's finances, including its insurance program, are part of our audited financial statements that are published annually on our website (<https://www.archbalt.org/the-archdiocese/annual-report/>).

### **Can survivors of abuse sue the Church for monetary claims?**

Yes. Current law in the State of Maryland allows individuals to sue for monetary damages in cases of child sexual abuse until age 38. With the support of the Catholic Church in Maryland, the State passed a law in 2017 extending the age from 25 to 38, recognizing that childhood survivors of such crimes often wait many years before reporting their abuse.

### **Is there a statute of limitations on the criminal prosecution of abusers?**

In the State of Maryland, anyone who has committed a felony, including child sexual abuse, can be prosecuted at any time. There is no statute of limitations for felonies in Maryland.

### **What is being done to ensure healthy and well-formed future priests?**

Drastic changes have been made to the way the Church recruits future priests and in the training and formation of seminarians. Years ago, high schools served as minor seminaries for boys who would then enter seminaries as early as 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Today, the Archdiocese of Baltimore's program for priestly formation will not accept men until they have completed high school. In addition, the Archdiocese employs a rigorous screening process that utilizes a series of examinations, background checks and interviews prior to admitting men into its formation program. In addition, seminaries have made great advances in the training, forming and evaluating of men for suitability as priests.

### **Will the Church release its files on abusive priests?**

In 2002, the Archdiocese of Baltimore became among the first dioceses in the world to examine its personnel files and release the names of all known priests who had been credibly accused of abuse. Making public entire personnel files would violate state and federal privacy laws and releasing even redacted files would, some survivors worry, still pose a risk to their privacy.

### **Will the Church request/submit to an independent review of its files?**

The Church has and will continue to cooperate with any law enforcement investigation by making available requested information in conjunction with any investigation of Church personnel. The Maryland Attorney General is conducting an investigation and thorough review of Archdiocesan records related to sexual abuse of children. The Archdiocese is supportive of the review and will be fully cooperative throughout the process.