

# REPORT OF THE NATIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 2007

## To the Catholic Faithful of the United States:

On the fifth anniversary of its establishment, the National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People (NRB) sends this report on its work to the Catholic community. It is a record of accomplishments, unfinished work, and challenges that lie ahead.

The members of the Board, representing the diversity of the Church in the United States, have worked diligently with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) through its Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People (CPCYP) to address the nature, causes, and consequences of the sexual abuse crisis and the prevention of such action in the future. The Board concentrates on the responsibilities assigned to it in the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (Charter)*. They include:

- advising on the audits of the dioceses and eparchies to assure compliance with the *Charter* adopted in Dallas,
- overseeing the Office of Child and Youth Protection (OCYP),
- completing major research studies,
- reviewing policies and practices for the protection of children and youth,
- recommending ways to provide safer environments.

Though much has been accomplished, much remains to be done.

## Accomplishments

### The Audit Process

For the past four years, dioceses and eparchies have been audited to assure the implementation and maintenance of the standards established in the *Charter*. Those audits provide substantial evidence of the bishops' efforts to protect children and respond to the abuses of the past and present. As of 2006, 98% of the dioceses and eparchies are participating in the audits. Those audited are in full compliance with the standards.

- The standards require implementation of safe environment programs and background checks for employees and volunteers. To this point over six million children have participated in educational programs and over 1.6 million background investigations have taken place.
- In addition dioceses have established procedures to respond promptly to allegations, including reports of allegations to public authorities, diocesan review boards to evaluate allegations, and programs to reach out to victims and their families.
- In an effort to maintain transparency, the USCCB publishes the results of these audits in an annual report that includes the numbers of new credible allegations and the financial costs of responding to allegations.

### Research Projects

The Charter called for two major research studies.

- The John Jay College of Criminal Justice completed the first of these studies, *The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950-2002*, in 2004. That study provided an analysis of what happened: the number and nature of the allegations, the characteristics of the abusers and victims, and the financial impact on the Church.
- The second study, *Causes and Contexts*, will explore the why and how. It is discussed later under

work to be done.

### Oversight Structures

Successful implementation of the *Charter* and *Norms* necessitated structures to oversee and deliver programs at both the national and diocesan levels. These structures and programs are now in place and are being accepted as part of the fabric of the Church for the future.

- At the national level the CPCYP and NRB oversee the implementation of programs through their review of the work of the Office for Child and Youth Protection, which has responsibility for insuring *Charter* compliance on a day-to-day basis.
- On the local level, the dioceses and eparchies have offices that offer safe environment programs and respond to allegations and the needs of victims and their families.
- Although the presence of such structures and programs cannot ensure that abuse will not take place, each year the NRB has seen a strengthening of the processes that are needed to make such abuse less likely to occur, appropriately handle allegations, and address the needs of victims and their families.

Though these accomplishments are impressive, the Board believes that its work is only beginning.

### Work To Be Done

The audits have provided assurance that the dioceses and eparchies are doing what is required to meet the obligations of the *Charter*.

- What the audits do not measure is the quality of the work that the dioceses and parishes are doing. To gain that understanding, the Board is encouraging the USCCB to do random audits of the parishes and to work toward establishing best practices in educational programs, victim care, background checks, and investigation of allegations. During 2007, to provide a model to study for the future, a number of dioceses volunteered to pilot audits at the parish level. The NRB fully supports and encourages these parish audits.
- As to the adoption of best practices, a Safe Environment Work Group, comprised of bishops, board members, and consultants, completed a major report on safe environment training for children that included studies on the appropriateness of training, its scope, sequence, age and grade appropriateness, and the key elements of Church teaching as it applies to this training. Dioceses and eparchies are encouraged to follow the recommendations made in the report. The NRB made a similar set of recommendations for best practices for diocesan review boards that is presently under consideration by a committee of the USCCB.
- For the second research project, the *Causes and Context Study*, John Jay College is once again the principal investigator. Fordham University is collaborating in the research. The USCCB selected the College based on its excellent proposal, expertise in the area, and knowledgeable background, including the completion of the *Nature and Scope Study*. The research will explore the historical context of the abuse, the seminary training during the historical period, the psychological profiles of the offenders, the responses of the Church, and the nature and consequences of victimization. Fund raising is underway to meet the cost of the \$2.6 million study. The final results should be available in 2009 and provide the Church with insights to guide future actions.

### Challenges That Lie Ahead

The most difficult challenges that still face the bishops and the Board are not easily resolved since they involve extremely complex issues.

- One of the most significant issues is the need for a greater understanding of victimization and its consequences. Discussions with victims provide evidence of serious needs that still must be addressed in order for the victims and their families to find the healing that they need. The Board is hopeful the results of the *Causes and Context Study* will provide needed insights and

- recommendations.
- Another set of issues relates to the relationship of the Church to its priests, the vast majority of whom are not involved in the scandal, but many of whom feel alienated from both the bishops and the laity.
  - There is a particular need to provide appropriate protection and restoration for those accused but later found innocent.
  - Other issues include the need for greater speed in the process of determining credibility of allegations and consequent responses, as well as determination of an appropriate role for the Church in the supervision of offenders.
  - During the past few years, it has become apparent to members of the NRB that parishes also become victims of sexual abuse. Members of parishes experience both a sense of betrayal or outrage over accusations that lead to the removal of a pastor or associate. Often parishioners do not know how to respond to victims and their families and agonize over the lengthy process of determining appropriate responses. This is an area that needs much more attention.
  - Finally, the Board is seeking ways to communicate more effectively to the laity so that members of the Church are both better informed on the positive responses the Bishops have made and more active observers of the programs and processes in their parishes and dioceses. Such communication is vitally important since the work of the National Review Board is strengthened by vigilant parents and parishioners who investigate the presence and quality of the programs in their parishes and dioceses. The obligation to provide safe environments that prevent damage to children, young people, families, parishes, dioceses, and the Church rests with all Catholics.

The laity can be assured of the Board's continuing dedication. We ask in return for your prayers, support, and vigilance.