March 14, 2019

Dear Brother Priest,

In light of the Holy See’s recent global summit on abuse, and so that you may better address any inquiries you may receive, I feel this is an opportune moment to highlight the Archdiocese of Washington’s longstanding policies and practices with respect to these most serious matters. As well, it is an opportunity to present additional steps we have taken recently during our regular, periodic review of these practices by our independent Child Protection and Safe Environment Advisory and Case Review Board, as it is now known.

The Archdiocese of Washington is committed to a safe parish, school, workplace and seminary environment for all persons, with special concern for the most vulnerable individuals we are called to serve. Since 1986 the Archdiocese has had comprehensive child protection and safe environment policies and accompanying procedures. We have also maintained strict employment policies and standards of conduct that prohibit all forms of harassment and/or abuse of adults and children by clergy, religious, employees and volunteers. While these policies have held bishops accountable, recent updates codify the process of review for allegations against bishops, and reinforce the policies we have had in place for more than 30 years.

Since 1986 the Archdiocese has also had in place its independent review board, made up almost entirely of lay professionals, including at least one survivor of abuse, which monitors the archdiocese’s outreach and compliance with the archdiocesan Child Protection and Safe Environment policies. Our independent, lay, Child Protection Advisory Board also publishes an annual report on our child protection efforts, which is available on the archdiocese website. Moreover, our enforcement of child protection policies, as well as our record of compliance, is audited each year by an independent firm and the results of these audits are published annually on our website.

The Archdiocese has long maintained mechanisms to report cases of abuse of minors to the Office of Child Protection and Safe Environment. The Archdiocese has also utilized an Ethics and Compliance Hotline, operated by EthicsPoint, an independent, third-party service, which allows individuals to communicate other types of misconduct anonymously and confidentially, which then forwards claims to the appropriate officials. Information on both of these reporting vehicles may also be found on the website adw.org.
Specifically, to ensure that our church environments are safe, under the archdiocesan policy, seminarians, clergy, teachers, and other employees and volunteers who work with children are required to undergo comprehensive criminal background checks. Training in child protection is also required for adults who have substantial contact with children under our care, including teachers, volunteers and even parents. The young people in our archdiocesan schools and programs receive education in safe-environment – learning how to protect themselves and be aware of interactions that are not appropriate. Persons with contact with children are additionally required to follow certain guidelines in interacting with these young people.

Also for many years, the Archdiocese has had processes in place to address claims of abuse and other wrongdoing, particularly those related to the protection of youth and the vulnerable entrusted to our care. The updated policy includes specific procedures for review of improper conduct against adults and abuse of power, as well as language referencing the archdiocese’s reporting mechanisms for misconduct by bishops.

First, when archdiocesan personnel receive allegations of suspected inappropriate contact or conduct involving minors, they must report those allegations immediately to civil authorities. By cooperating in criminal and child welfare investigations, the archdiocese has facilitated the criminal prosecution of those who have abused children in the archdiocese’s care, and we will continue to do so.

The Office of Child Protection and Safe Environment is the initial contact for all claims of child sexual abuse or adult misconduct and it also reports to civil authorities. Immediate protective measures are taken as well, including placing the accused on administrative leave pending final resolution and offering care and support to alleged victims.

Meanwhile, cases proceed to an independent Case Review Board, which investigates and reviews all matters referred to it and makes recommendations for action to the archbishop. In the case of clergy, after reviewing the recommendations of the Case Review Board, the archbishop makes the final determination. In the case of religious order clergy, the recommendations of the Case Review Board are referred to the relevant religious superior for a final determination.

As has been our practice, allegations regarding bishops are also referred both to the Case Review Board and to the Apostolic Nuncio. Recommendations of the Case Review Board are also forwarded to the Apostolic Nuncio.
In September 2018 Cardinal Donald Wuerl called for a “Season of Healing” to pray for the survivors of sexual abuse and their families and loved ones. As part of that on-going endeavor, the archdiocese has continued its outreach to survivors and also created new opportunities to provide meaningful assistance through retreats for men and women. We are pleased to report that a retreat for women will be held on April 12-14, 2019. A future retreat for men continues to be organized; more information on these retreats can be found on our website.

As a reminder, should you or one of your staff be approached regarding such matters, please keep in mind that under archdiocesan policies and under civil law, you are mandatory reporters for any and all such claims against minors. Should the individuals who approach you decline to provide specifics, please encourage them to contact civil authorities, such as law enforcement and or direct them to contact our Office of Child Abuse and Safe Environment at 301-853-5328 or Courtney Chase, Executive Director of the Office of Child Abuse and Safe Environment directly at 301-853-5302.

Thank you for all you do to protect children and vulnerable adults and for your outreach to survivors of abuse.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely in Christ,

Reverend Monsignor Charles V. Antonicelli
Moderator of the Curia