

From the Desk of Fr. Gary
October 7, 2018

This past week we had two meetings of parishioners to discuss the sexual abuse crisis in the church. They were good meetings with honest and frank dialogue. The comments, suggestions, and questions are being compiled and will be sent to the Archbishop for his consideration at the Presbyteral Council meeting on November 8, and at the national meeting of the U.S. Bishops later in November. We will also provide a link to these notes on our website as soon as the compiling work is completed.

During the meetings at St. Joseph and St. Thomas, a number of questions were raised about practices and procedures around creating a safe environment for our children and vulnerable adults. I want to share with you a summary of those policies and procedures and encourage you to read the entire documents. There are links on our website to the documents I will describe.

The fundamental and guiding document is entitled, “The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.” This document was approved by the U.S. Bishops at their meeting in Dallas in June of 2002, and has been revised and updated over the years. The most recent update was in June of this year. This document is often referred to simply as “The Dallas Charter.”

The Charter was the bishops’ response to the sexual abuse crisis that had exploded in the U.S. in the early months of 2002, when the Boston Globe published a series of articles exposing the abuse of children by priests and the systematic cover-up of that abuse. The 2015 film, “Spotlight,” effectively and powerfully tells the story of the investigation that led to the revelations of sexual abuse by clergy and cover-up by bishops.

The Charter mandates a number of policies for the church in the United States and has essentially created what has come to be known as “Safe Environment Policies.” These policies include outreach to victims; creating policies and procedures to respond promptly to any allegation of sexual abuse, including contacting the police; instructing dioceses not to enter into confidentiality agreements with victims unless the victim requests such confidentiality; procedures for permanently removing a priest or deacon from ministry for any credible accusation of sexual abuse; the establishment of diocesan and national review boards to examine allegations of sexual abuse; mandating criminal background checks and safe environment training for all clergy, and for all church personnel (whether paid or volunteer) who have unsupervised access to children or young adults. We have also placed a link on our website to the safe environment policies for the Archdiocese of Seattle.

What was not included in the 2002 Charter, nor in subsequent revisions, is any accountability for bishops who either abuse children or cover-up abuse by members of the clergy. It is this issue that the Bishops plan to address at their meeting next month, and that the Pope intends to address at a meeting of the heads of every bishop conference in the world in February of 2019.

In January of 2016, the Archdiocese of Seattle published a list of all clergy in Western Washington for whom allegations of sexual abuse of a minor have been admitted, established, or determined to be credible. The list resulted from a review of clergy files by an independent

consulting firm with a strong background in law enforcement. There is a link to this list on our website.

I encourage you to take some time to read the Charter and the policies of the Archdiocese of Seattle. One of the ideas that emerged over and over again at our meetings was the need for all of us to be trained in how to create a safe environment for our children. As I shared above, all church employees (including clergy and seminarians), and all volunteers who work with children or vulnerable adults are required to undergo a criminal background check and safe environment training. But this training is not limited to these church workers. All of us would benefit from this training and this would be another step along the way of assuring our children are safe. On our website, and in our Bulletin, we will continue to highlight safe environment training opportunities in our area.

Finally, let me share with you the information that appears on all our documents around safe environment: *To report any suspicion of abuse by any Church personnel, please contact local law enforcement. In addition, anyone who has knowledge of sexual abuse or misconduct by a member of the clergy, an employee or volunteer of the Archdiocese of Seattle is urged to call the archdiocesan hotline at 1-800-446-7762.*

Thank you for your suggestions and efforts around keeping our children safe, and holding our leaders accountable. May the Lord continue to guide us, and especially our Church leaders, in putting the needs of the vulnerable above all other priorities.

God Bless,
Fr. Gary Lazzeroni