



# DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

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Office of Communications

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## **Statement by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez of the Diocese of St. Augustine**

DATE: August 14, 2018  
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### **Bishop Estévez is Fully Committed to Protecting Minors & Vulnerable Adults**

Jacksonville, Fla. – On Tuesday, August 14, a Pennsylvania grand jury released a report on widespread sexual abuse of minors involving allegations of 301 priests in six Pennsylvania dioceses. According to the report, the abuses occurred over a 70-year period and involved more than 1,000 victims and their families. And even more horrific, the report said church leaders knew of the abuses, and some did not prevent it from again.

In the wake of the grand jury report in Pennsylvania, the allegations against Archbishop Theodore McCarrick and other allegations that have come to light involving seminaries, Bishop Felipe Estévez of the Diocese of St. Augustine said he remains firmly committed to providing safe environments for everyone, especially children and vulnerable adults.

“I am profoundly saddened to hear of the lives that have been shattered at the hands of clergymen and the mishandling of these cases over a 70-year period,” said Bishop Estévez. “I want to see greater transparency and greater accountability among all bishops, and we must demonstrate a spirit of repentance and recommitment so that such abuse cannot happen again and we can restore the full trust of our people.”

The Diocese of St. Augustine implemented policies and procedures to address allegations of abuse in 1989. In 2002, the U.S. Bishops adopted the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. The Charter was revised in 2011 and again in 2018. The Charter pledges to maintain transparency and to provide for the permanent removal of offenders from ministry and to maintain safe environments for everyone.

As part of the Charter, each diocese is audited annually with onsite visits by independent auditors every three years. The Diocese of St. Augustine is getting ready for an onsite review on Oct. 15 to ensure we are demonstrating transparency and accountability. The diocese has been found compliant every year since the audits began in 2003.

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Here are some of the measures taken by the Diocese of St. Augustine:

- More than 45,000 adults in the diocese have been trained in the Protecting God’s Children program.
- Since 2002, the diocese has screened and conducted national and international criminal background checks on more than 48,000 clergy, employees and volunteers with a renewal every five years.
- The diocese spends on average \$220,000 each year for its child protection efforts.
- Children who attend our Catholic schools and parish programs are taught to recognize a predator’s grooming process, to say “No,” and to tell their parents and other trusted adults about such behavior.
- Procedures are in place to respond promptly with compassion to all reports of misconduct – treating all victims with dignity, respect, privacy, and confidentiality.
- The Bishop meets with victims to assist in their recovery.
- There is a Zero Tolerance for sexual abusers.

Also, the diocese has in place an independent Review Board to hear complaints and allegations, and provide direction on their outcomes. The board is made up of a sitting district judge, a prosecuting attorney with experience in sex crimes, a child psychiatrist, a physician, nurse, former police detective, a victims advocate and other lay men and women who serve as staff.

How to Report Abuse notices, in various languages, are published in parish bulletins and the *St. Augustine Catholic* magazine. The notices provide the phone numbers to the Department of Children and Families and the Victim Assistance Coordinator for the diocese.

The Province of Miami, which is comprised of the seven dioceses and their bishops in Florida, will meet in November to review the policies and procedures in place. The bishops continually look for ways to strengthen their efforts. It is unfortunate that we continue to hear of child abuse cases committed by clergy, but the diocese is doing everything possible to protect our children and vulnerable adults. That is our foremost concern.

As Catholics, we need to be reminded that a majority of the abuses we are hearing about in the media today are the failings of church leadership from the last century. That is not the church we have today. Our bishops have mandated the implementation of strict policies and procedures to safeguard our children and vulnerable adults. They are committed to transparency and accountability. But more work needs to be done.

If you would like to discuss this further, please call Kathleen Bagg at (904) 262-1705, or call (904) 208-6979 to report abuse. To view our policies and procedures, visit [www.dosafl.com](http://www.dosafl.com).

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