



Communication Resources

Regarding the Sex Abuse Crisis in the Catholic Church

People in the Church might have a difficult time communicating about the sex-abuse crisis that has affected so many innocent lives of children and vulnerable adults. How do we have an open and honest dialogue when we can't find the words to express our feelings? Each situation can be different as you speak with Catholics, non-Catholics, co-workers, friends and family. The communications office at the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee has provided some suggestions to help you share the light of Christ in this time of darkness.

The Importance of Prayer during Crisis

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.
– 2 Chronicles 7:14

Some may feel that this crisis is hopeless. It is important to stay steadfast in prayer when we feel a sense of despair and to trust in God's providence in dark times.

Pray for the wounded victims and all affected by abuse, that we may all be compassionate and listen to those who are hurting.

Pray for those who are disheartened, angry and confused, that they may find healing, grace and peace.

Let us pray for our Church, that bishops, priests and all who minister to God's people will keep each other accountable. Pray that they may have the strength and courage to do what is right and holy.

Pray that all evil is cast out of our Church and the world.

Pray in thanksgiving for all bishops and priests who serve faithfully, that their light continues to radiate as they minister to God's people.

Links to additional prayers:

<https://ptdiocese.org/safeenvironmentprayers>

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/resources/upload/rosary-for-healing-booklet.pdf>

Open Dialogue is Good

It's not purely what we say, but how and when we say it, that matter. At times, it's difficult to speak when conversations can be confrontational. In today's world, conversations can take place face to face, or through social media, or by email or phone, etc. It's important to remember that everyone is

experiencing the abuse crisis differently. React with love and be calm while listening. Pray before you communicate. Be loving at all times and listen with your heart.

“The walls which divide us can be broken down only if we are prepared to listen and learn from one another.” – Pope Francis (2014 World Communications Day Message)

Center Our Hearts on the Victims and all Affected

The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee places great emphasis on providing a safe environment to children and vulnerable adults. Survivors of sexual abuse experience a tremendous amount of emotional, physical and mental pain that can never be erased. It's important to have compassion for those who are hurting and to pray for those who are suffering.

The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee encourages anyone who may have been abused, or who is aware of abuse, to report it so that we may help individuals in the healing process and better ensure safety to all. Report any concerns or allegations to the authorities by calling local law enforcement or the Florida Department of Children and Families Abuse Hotline at 1-800-962-2873 (1-800-96ABUSE). The diocese has established Victim's Assistance Coordinators, experienced and trained counselors available to help persons who have been sexually abused. The Coordinator for the Pensacola/Ft. Walton area is Louis Makarowski, PhD., PA at 850-477-7181; the Tallahassee/Panama City area Coordinator is Dr. James Gagnon, MSW, LCSW at 850-877-0205; and the Hispanic contact is Santiago Molino at 850-627-2350.

Speaking to Teens about the Abuse Crisis

Parents are the primary educators of their children. It is important to educate yourself on the abuse crisis before speaking to children. Learning the facts is the first step in prevention. Statistics show that one in 10 children will be sexually abused by 18 years of age. Before having a discussion with teens, pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit. Remember to be open and honest. Let your teen know that you don't have all the answers. Being Catholic in this time of turmoil can be difficult for teens. Remind them of the richness of the sacraments. Reassure your teen that Christ is at the center of it all.

For additional talking points visit: <https://www.pbgrace.com/respond-to-clerical-sex-abuse/>

Share Facts

Although there is much work left to do to protect the lives of children, education is key in knowing what has been done.

The National Review Board and the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection of the USCCB recently published the 2017 Annual Report on the *Implementation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, which was established in 2002 through annual independent audits of the dioceses. From the 2017 audit, the Catholic Church in the U.S. has done the following:

- trained 98 percent of our 205 million volunteers, employees, educators, clergy and candidates in parishes on how to create safe environments and prevent sexual abuse,
- prepared more than 4.4 million children to recognize and protect themselves;

- and run background checks on more than two million volunteers and employees, including 49,762 clerics.

The overwhelming majority of priests serve their parishes faithfully.

The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee upholds a strict, safe environment policy. The diocese has an internal review board in place to review and assist with all matters pertaining to violations with the Charter.

Share Hope for the Future

The USCCB continues to reinforce the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. Most recently, the Executive Committee established a plan for accomplishing three goals, relying upon experts, laity, clergy and the Vatican. The three goals will be pursued according to three criteria: proper independence, sufficient authority and substantial leadership of laity.

- Goal 1: An investigation into the questions surrounding Archbishop McCarrick.
- Goal 2: An opening of new confidential channels for reporting complaints against bishops.
- Goal 3: Advocacy for more effective resolutions of future complaints.

Cardinal DiNardo, President of the USCCB, said in a recent statement, “The overarching goal in all of this is stronger protections against predators in the Church and anyone who would conceal them, protections that will hold bishops to the highest standards of transparency and accountability.”

Don’t be afraid to share hope for the future. Let us be brave and courageous each step of the way.

“Three things are necessary to everyone: truth of faith which brings understanding, love of Christ which brings compassion, and endurance of hope which brings perseverance.” – St. Bonaventure

“The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men's activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity.” – *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1818*

Our Commitment

The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee has worked hard since the establishment of the Bishops’ Charter to be proactive in its efforts to protect children, young people, and vulnerable persons who are part of our parish ministries. Our Diocese has been fully engaged in the annual Charter audit process. We have been found compliant in implementing the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* since its inception in 2002.

We recognize and thank victims and survivors who have come forward over the years to share their stories and seek assistance and help. It is because of these courageous and wounded individuals that our Diocesan protection program is committed to outreach and healing of those who have been harmed by ministers and/or employees of the Church.

We are grateful for the numerous people on the diocesan and parish level who have made the Church a safer place for worship, education, fellowship and community activities. And while we have come a long way over the years, our Diocese continues to work toward strengthening our outreach to victims, survivors, and vulnerable adults. It is indeed one of our top priorities to protect, safeguard and provide resources that will allow our parishes and Catholic community to be a powerful witness to Jesus who proclaimed good news and offered healing to the sick, broken, outcasts and disenfranchised. We are committed as disciples to do the same.

Additional Information (Links)

Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee Safe Environment

<https://ptdiocese.org/safeenvironment>

USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/upload/Charter-for-the-Protection-of-Children-and-Young-People-2018-final.pdf>

USCCB Child and Youth Protection

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection>