



Protect and Heal – Creating a Safe Environment for All

“We are not seeking to cover up the sins of the past. We acknowledge that sexual abuse occurred; it is tragic and heartbreaking. We want abusers to be held accountable and we wish to dispel the fear that clergy sexual abuse is rampant today, because it is not.”

~ Archbishop Paul D. Etienne, August 2024

Sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult is an intrinsic moral evil and a crime. Anyone responsible for such an act, or for shielding those who have caused harm, including bishops and other Church leaders, must be held accountable for their actions. This sentiment is alive in the Archdiocese of Seattle. Many times, Archbishop Paul D. Etienne has discussed the sin of sexual abuse and his sincere desire for healing for all victim survivors and their families.

The purpose of this overview is to share the social and legal context for child sexual abuse and the response and prevention measures taken by the Archdiocese of Seattle to create a safe environment for all.

Societal & Legal Understanding of Child Sexual Abuse in America

Societal Understanding	Legal Response
<p>1960s – “Battered Child Syndrome” first defined by the <i>Journal of the American Medical Association</i>. Duty to report solely by medical staff.</p>	<p>1971 – Duty to report expanded in Washington State to teachers, social workers, psychologists, clergy, pharmacists, Department of Social & Health Services staff.</p>
<p>Mid 1980s – School-based safety programs implemented.</p>	
<p>1989 – Clearinghouses (information repositories) for teachers (<i>voluntary</i>) and medical practitioners (<i>Health & Human Services</i>) implemented.</p>	
<p>1989 – Meta study of sex offender treatment research undercuts belief that pedophilia was a treatable psychiatric</p>	

<p>condition. Prior to this study, it was believed that sex offenders could be effectively “cured” through inpatient or intensive outpatient treatment. <i>(Furby, L., Weinrott, M. R., & Blackshaw, L. (1989). Sex offender recidivism: A review. Psychological Bulletin, 105(1), 3-30)</i></p>	
<p>1990 – Washington State enacts Community Protection Act, first civil commitment law for those designated as Sexually Violent Predators.^A</p>	<p>1993 – National Child Protection Act improves availability of criminal/abuse records and requires background checks.</p>
	<p>2006 – Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act provides uniform classification of sex offenders and creates national sex offender registry.</p>
<p>2020 – American Psychological Association found “no empirical evidence that Catholic priests sexually engage with minor children, including teens, at a higher rate than those of other groups of men.”^B</p>	

^A RCW 71.09

^B “Clergy Sexual Abuse in the Roman Catholic Church: Dispelling Eleven Myths and Separating Facts from Fiction” by Thomas G. Plane, Santa Clara University and published by American Psychological Association in 2020.

Sexual Abuse in Society and the Catholic Church Nationally

In the early 1990s the issue of child sexual abuse began to more regularly appear in the headlines of major news outlets and gain public awareness. This was in part due to a sea change in the response to sexual abuse of children based on studies asserting that predatory sexual behavior is not treatable, as was believed at the time. Here is a history of key milestones:

- Federal background checks were not widely available until the 1990s.
- In 2002, the U.S. Conference of Catholic of Bishops (USCCB) published the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which has since been revised in 2005, 2011, and 2018. It includes six principles:
 1. Creating a safe environment for children and young people
 2. Healing and reconciliation of victims and survivors
 3. Making a prompt and effective response to allegations
 4. Cooperating with civil authorities
 5. Disciplining offenders

- Providing accountability to ensure abuse is effectively dealt with through the Secretariat of Child Protection and the National Review Board.
- In 2018, the National Review Board issued a Special Report to the Body of Bishops recommending steps the Church should take to further enhance transparency concerning past cases of abuse and to ensure accountability by all Bishops.
- Over the past decade, more research has been done, including a 2020 report published by the American Psychological Association that found, “There is no empirical evidence that Catholic priests sexually engage with minor children, including teens, at a higher rate than those of other groups of men, inside or outside religious communities.”¹

Sexual Abuse Response in the Archdiocese of Seattle

See appendix A – Timeline of Action

Prevention:

- The Archdiocese of Seattle began addressing clergy sexual abuse after a U.S. Bishops’ annual meeting discussion in 1985, almost two decades before similar programs became required for all dioceses in the United States.
- Pre-employment background check policy was initiated in 1989 for all archdiocesan employees and volunteers working with minors and vulnerable adults.
- Safe Environment Training began in 1990 and has been regularly updated. It is mandatory for all clergy, employees, and volunteers at schools and parishes.

Reporting Procedures/Investigation Process:

- Robust abuse reporting procedures have been in place since 1987.
- Since 1986, the Archdiocese of Seattle has had an independent Review Board,² comprised of experts on survivors and sexual abuse offenders, who assist the Archbishop in improving the response to victim survivors and implementing, and continuously improving, a comprehensive Safe Environment program.
- For allegations of abuse of a minor where the alleged abuser is still alive, the Archdiocese of Seattle alerts local law enforcement, as well as conducts an investigation. If the alleged

¹ “Clergy Sexual Abuse in the Roman Catholic Church: Dispelling Eleven Myths and Separating Facts from Fiction” by Thomas G. Plante, Santa Clara University and published by American Psychological Association in 2020.

² The Review Board is created under specific canon law as described in the *Essential Norms for Diocesan/ Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons*.

abuser is deceased, an internal investigation is conducted, which is shared with the Archdiocesan Review Board.

Transparency:

- In 2016, as part of the pastoral approach to these issues, the Archdiocese of Seattle voluntarily released a list of clergy and religious brothers and sisters for who allegations of sexual abuse of a minor have been admitted, established, or determined to be credible. The list is updated as new information comes to light.
- As of January 2026, there are 84 clergy listed including 34 archdiocesan priests (most of whom are deceased), 2 deacons, 16 priests from other dioceses, and 32 religious brothers and sisters.

Healing:

- The Archdiocese of Seattle offers pastoral care for victim survivors who reach us through the Victim Assistance Helpline.
- The Healing Ministry offers a robust response to victim survivors of sexual abuse as well as the communities impacted.
- Pastoral care is offered through the Abuse Helpline (800-446-7762). However, most allegations now come through plaintiff's attorneys representing clients with allegations of abuse from the 1950s to 1980s.

Protocols and Policies Today

Today the Archdiocese of Seattle operates under a well-defined protocol for responding to any allegation of a boundary violation, grooming, or sexual abuse or misconduct. Although there has not been a credible allegation of clergy sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult since 2007 (and prior to that since 1994), if there were, the clergy member would be immediately removed from ministry and law enforcement would be notified. A thorough investigation would be completed (as well as a criminal investigation by law enforcement). The investigation would be reviewed by the independent Review Board who would advise the archbishop on credibility.

If deemed credible, a canonical process would ensue while the clergy member remains out of ministry. All clergy have a right to due process and canonical representation. The Dicastery of Faith at the Vatican would determine if the priest is placed on permanent prayer and penance or laicized (removed from priesthood).

Statistics

The 2021 U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) annual Safe Environment audit revealed the following:

- 55% of credible allegations occurred or began before 1975.
- 41% occurred or began between 1975 and 1999.
- 4% began or occurred since 2000.

Within the Archdiocese of Seattle:

- Reports of clergy sexual abuse have virtually disappeared over the last several decades.
- Reported incidents of clergy sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult peaked nearly 50 years ago; **99% occurred prior to 1995**. There are two known victim survivors of clergy abuse since 1990.
- Prior to 2006, the Archdiocese of Seattle settled approximately 204 claims for approximately \$20M.
- Since 2006, the Archdiocese of Seattle settled approximately 282 claims for approximately \$111.9M.

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 helpline.

Helpline: 800-446-7762
helpline@seattlearch.org

Appendix A - Timeline of Action

1985	U.S. bishops discuss abuse of minors at annual meeting.
1986	Review of all priest personnel files completed internally.
1986	CYO Camping Risk Management Plan – includes sections on physical or psychological injury to camper due to physical or sexual molestation by staff.
1987	Priest names submitted to Greg Canova, Attorney General’s Office, through Norm Maleng’s Office, Prosecuting Attorney, King County. Investigator Bob Keppel assigned by Washington State to do a multi-county investigation.
1987	Pastoral Resources Binder requires all employees and volunteers who work with children to report sexual abuse and exploitation.
1988	Special Task Force (later named Special Advisory Board) convened to develop policies, procedures, and protocols for sexual ethics.
1988	Statement by Archbishop Hunthausen concerning policy of Archdiocese of Seattle to deal with issues of child molestation. Includes alerting law enforcement.
1988	First Archdiocesan Policy in Cases of Child Abuse.
1989	CYO Outdoor Ministry Personnel Policies and Practices – staff may not physically, sexually, or verbally abuse anyone, including campers.

1989	Report of Special Advisory Board (aka Special Task Force) Concerning Child Sexual Abuse by Church Personnel released.
1989	Blue Ribbon Committee established to implement policies, procedures, and protocols.
1990	Archdiocese publishes <i>Sexual Misconduct Policies and Procedures</i> .
1990	Archdiocese institutes Washington pre-employment background check policy for all paid employees of Archdiocese and volunteers working with minors and vulnerable adults.
1990	Archdiocese begins Safe Environment Program: <i>Workshops on Professional Ethics: Sexual Abuse by Clergy and Other Ministers</i> by The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Mandatory attendance required for all priests.
1991	Draft Protocol for Reporting & Responding to Sexual Misconduct by current or former Archdiocesan priests, deacons, or employees.
1991	CYO Staff Manual – procedures if staff person accused or suspected of camper abuse.
1992	Sexual Misconduct Policy brochure created and distributed.
1992	Screening Procedure for prospective employees and volunteers.
1995	Professional Ethics Policy published.
2000	Ministerial Responsibility Requirements set standards for conduct for clergy, employees, and volunteers as well as developed training workshops.
2001	Background checks expanded to include out-of-state criminal records.
Ar2001	Blue Ribbon Committee replaced by Special Cases Committee to review individual cases and make recommendations for suitability for ministry, and oversight of those in restricted ministry. Policy Review Committee also added.
2002	U.S. Bishops (USCCB) approve Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors / Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.
2003	Special Case Review Committee replaced by Archdiocesan Review Committee in accordance with Norms established by the USCCB. Purpose is to review all cases and advise on credibility.

2004	Policy for Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Response to Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors implemented. (Revisions reflect pastoral experience, requirements of the USCCB Charter, Essential Norms, and input from the Policy Review Board.)
2007	Policy for the Prevention and Response to Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment and Code of Professional Conduct promulgated. Replaces Policy for Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Response to Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors (2004) and Ministerial Responsibility Requirements (2000). (Revisions reflect USCCB Charter 2005 updates.)
2009	Revised Policy for the Prevention and Response to Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment.
2012	Summary of Process When an Allegation of Clergy Sexual Abuse is Received (Priestly Rights).
2014/2015	Dr. Kathleen McChesney, former FBI special agent, hired to conduct independent review of archdiocesan files, identifying list of clergy and religious brothers and sisters for whom allegations of sexual abuse of a minor have been admitted, established, or determined to be credible.
2015	Revised Code of Professional Conduct for Church Personnel. Revised Policy for the Prevention and Response to Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment.
2016	After review by Archdiocesan Review Board and Archbishop Peter J. Sartain, Archdiocese voluntarily publishes list of clergy and religious brothers and sisters for whom allegations of sexual abuse of a minor have been admitted, established or determined to be credible. Updates made as new information comes to light.
2018	Revised Policy for the Prevention and Response to Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment.
2019	Revised Code of Professional Conduct for Church Personnel. Revised Policy for the Prevention and Response to Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment.
2020	U.S. Bishops launch the national Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting System.
2021	Revised Code of Professional Conduct for Church Personnel. Revised Policy for the Prevention and Response to Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment.
2024	Healing Ministry launched.
2025	Added new name to the official list of Clergy and Religious Brothers and Sisters for Whom Allegations of Sexual Abuse of a Minor Have Been Admitted, Established or Determined to be Credible.

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