

Diocese of Jackson Audit

The Diocese of Jackson (“the Diocese”) was originally established as the Diocese of Natchez in 1837, was renamed the Diocese of Natchez-Jackson, and assumed its current identity in 1977. The Diocese encompasses 65 counties in Mississippi, consists of 74 parishes and 19 schools. There are six deacons and 65 diocesan priests who serve a population of 51,347 registered Catholics. The Most Reverend Joseph N. Latino, who was installed as bishop in 2003, leads the Diocese. A compliance audit of the Diocese was conducted during the period of October 20-24, 2003.

The information set forth below represents conditions as they were found during the week of the audit.

FINDINGS

To Promote Healing and Reconciliation

The Diocese has established an outreach program. While there have been no allegations of abuse since June 2002, the bishop has stated his willingness to meet with any victims/survivors who may come forward in the future. The diocesan review board was established in 1994 and consists of eight members, including two priests and six respected members of the lay community. The procedures for making a complaint of abuse are readily available in printed form. There have been no confidentiality agreements entered into by the Diocese since June 2002.

To Guarantee Effective Response to Allegations of Abuse of a Minor

The Diocese has established effective liaison with local civil authorities, ensuring that an open dialogue regarding sexual abuse allegations will occur. A commendation was issued to the Diocese for the excellence of its cooperation with civil authorities. The Diocese has a procedure in place to advise victims/survivors of their right to report allegations of abuse by a member of the clergy to civil authorities. The Diocese has established a clear and well-publicized code of conduct for priests and deacons. The Diocese has a communications policy that reflects the bishop’s pledge to be open and transparent of issues regarding the sexual abuse of children. A Commendation was issued for the participation of Bishop Latino in a statewide televised panel discussion regarding sexual abuse of minors.

To Ensure Accountability of Procedures

The Diocese has participated in the research study regarding the “nature and scope” of the problem of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy.

To Protect the Faithful in the Future

The Diocese has developed and implemented a safe environment program. The Diocese has publicized standards of conduct for priests and deacons, as well as diocesan employees, volunteers, and any other church personnel in positions of trust who have regular contact with children and young people. The Diocese is conducting background evaluations for all diocesan and parish personnel who have regular contact with minors. The Diocese has not transferred any priest or deacon who has had a credible allegation of sexual abuse lodged against him to another diocese for ministerial assignment or for purposes of residence. The bishop, or his delegate, and the major superiors have coordinated their respective roles regarding issues of allegations of sexual abuse made against a cleric member of a religious institute. The Diocese has not had an opportunity to cooperate with other churches, religious bodies and institutions of learning in conducting research in the area of sexual abuse of minors. The Diocese has established screening and evaluative techniques in the selection of candidates for ordination and ongoing formation programs for priests.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE *CHARTER*

As of December 1, 2003, the Diocese of Jackson was found to be compliant with the provisions of the *Charter* as measured by the process described in Chapter 2 in Section I. The Diocese was issued four Commendations.

COMMENDATION 1 – For the appearance of Bishop Latino on a statewide televised panel discussion, which included the state coordinator of a major advocacy group, regarding the issue of sexual abuse of minors.

COMMENDATION 2 – For an excellent sexual abuse prevention policy, which has been in existence in the Diocese since 1986 and has been continually updated and improved.

COMMENDATION 3 – For the establishment of a review board in 1994 and the excellence of the composition and activities of the board.

COMMENDATION 4 – For the excellence of the Diocese's cooperation with civil authorities in dealing with matters of sexual abuse of minors