

Communications Policy for the Diocese of Jackson regarding accusations of abuse by Church Personnel

The Diocese of Jackson is committed to protecting children. Sexual misconduct by church personnel violates human dignity and the mission of the Church. The Diocese is committed to ensuring that children being served by the Church are not at risk of sexual abuse by Church personnel. The spiritual well-being of all victims, their families, and others in the community is of particular concern to the Church.

The Diocese therefore urges anyone who has been a victim of abuse by church personnel, who has not yet reported the abuse, to come forward and do so. Our victims' assistance coordinator, Ms. Erika Rojas, a licensed social worker, is available to assist in making a report. Ms. Rojas's telephone number is 601-326-3736.

In the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, regarding allegations of sexual abuse of minors the U.S. Bishops pledged:

- that all allegations of abuse would be subject to review by a panel of non-diocesan lay experts who would evaluate and recommend an approach for each case regardless of age; [i.e. how long ago the abuse occurred]
- that all allegations would be subject to reporting to law enforcement;
- that dioceses would cooperate with law enforcement in their investigations;
- that offenders whose abuse was admitted or established would be permanently removed from ministry;
- that dioceses would communicate openly with the people about abuse and abusers, and that these promises would be subject to an annual audit whose results would be public.

Therefore, the Diocese of Jackson will maintain the following policy in dealing with allegations of abuse of a minor by church personnel.

- All allegations of abuse are reviewed by the Diocesan Fitness Review Board. The Board is comprised primarily of lay people not employed by the Diocese of Jackson, who have expertise in the area of law, health and abuse.
- The Fitness Review Board will recommend to the Bishop a course of action.
- When an allegation is received and during the review of the allegation the accused is temporarily removed from ministry.
- Offenders whose abuse is admitted or established are completely removed from public ministry.
- In the event of an allegation of abuse, all civil reporting requirements will be observed.
- Where applicable all allegations that are determined to have a semblance of truth are reported to the religious community of the accused or religious or secular institution where the accused is currently serving inside or outside of the diocese.

- The Diocese of Jackson will cooperate fully with law enforcement in the investigation.
- If the allegation is substantiated or admitted, the identity of the offender is released in a letter; a personal visit from the Bishop to the place where the offender was currently serving in the diocese occurs; and a letter is sent to all places where the offender had served in the diocese.
- Where applicable if the offender had served in other dioceses or institutions, those dioceses and institutions are notified at this time.
- If the allegation is substantiated or admitted, an official statement from the Diocese of Jackson will be placed on the diocesan web site www.jacksondiocese.org and printed in the diocesan newspaper, *Mississippi Catholic*.
- The following announcement is printed quarterly in the diocesan newspaper and in parish bulletins:

In accordance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People passed by the U.S. bishops in Dallas, the Diocese of Jackson wishes to encourage any victim of sexual abuse by a member of the Catholic Clergy to come forward and begin the healing process. When an allegation is found to be credible, counseling will be offered, so that the healing process can begin in accord with our present diocesan policy. We encourage any victim to contact Ms. Erika Rojas, Victims Assistance Coordinator at 601-326-3736