



Diocese of Worcester
Office of the Bishop
49 Elm Street
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609

October 30, 2015

My dear friends in Christ,

Over the coming weeks, some of you will see movie trailers for “Spotlight!” which is a cinematic portrayal of how the Boston Globe covered the crisis of abuse of children by members of the Catholic Church. As painful as it is to recall those days of continuous headlines about this heinous crime against innocent children, it is important that we pause and reflect on how much has happened since that terrible revelation. How is the Diocese of Worcester and the Catholic Church nationwide living up to the commitment made in Dallas in June of 2002 to protect and to heal?

First and foremost in our hearts and minds are those who were victims of these heinous acts and their family members. Many victims have come forward in their adulthood to tell the story of what they experienced as children; some seek help, others simply come to share their pain so that they may find help and healing. With the help of the Victims’ Assistance coordinator and the Diocesan Review Board, we have listened and responded to the best of our ability to dozens of victims and their family members since 2002, broadening the efforts which began locally with Bishop Harrington in the late 1980s and Bishop Reilly in the 1990s. While individual reports were the subject of headlines, countless more victims came forward simply to be believed so that they could move on with their lives and see that it would not happen to another child in the future.

I am deeply grateful to the many members of our Diocesan Review Board, more than half of whom are independent of the Church and bring invaluable experience in child care advocacy, civil law and law enforcement. Their expertise has been an important voice in victims advocacy as we sought to bring Christ’s healing to this pain.

While the above efforts were focused on healing, we have simultaneously been working toward protection of children in our care. As directed by the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, this effort began in 2002 with a two pronged approach: screening the backgrounds of ALL ordained and lay employees and volunteers with the Commonwealth as well as training everyone in identifying the signs and symptoms of child abuse. We have collaborated with various groups in the community including resources in the District Attorney’s Office, YWCA Daybreak and, most recently, the Dallas Child Advocacy Center, one of the largest such groups in the country. Since 2013, over 30,000 screenings and trainings have been done in our diocese. We also introduced a Code of Conduct which must be signed in advance of engaging in ministry, and our Review Board periodically reviews these programs and resources to incorporate improvements to face new challenges such as child pornography.

Additionally, we have introduced safety education in Catholic schools at various grade levels, as well as recommended supplemental resources for use in Religious Education Programs for students in public schools whose curriculum includes child safety.

One of the most challenging aspects of the Charter has been the need to accept that these efforts would not be an anomaly but the way we must conduct all affairs on an ongoing basis. Each year the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has contracted independent audits of each diocese's efforts. The Diocese of Worcester has been found compliant each year with all components of the Charter.

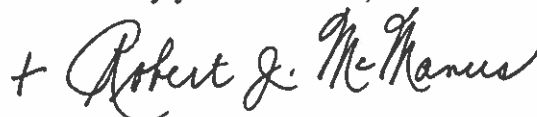
These crimes were heinous and they represented a broken trust on the part of some leaders in the Church to those who were harmed. While we are committed to restoring that trust, we know it will take time. Yet it would be naïve to think this is a problem that is limited to the Catholic Church or even to faith groups in general. Society is struggling with child abuse in many areas, and we have been providing key data to those who are conducting studies to help all of society to address it. The ten year report by the John Jay School of Criminal Justice and annual reporting to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University are but two examples of such collaboration.

In invite you to learn more about what we are doing locally and nationally. Please visit worcesterdiocese.org where you will find local resources and links to national reports. We have included essays or blogs from members of our Review Board in order to give you other insights into our response to this crisis.

It is my fervent prayer that we are applying the spirit of the words uttered by Pope Francis when he established the Pontifical Commission to oversee the Church's global response to child abuse: "Everything possible must be done to rid the Church of the scourge of the sexual abuse of minors and to open pathways of reconciliation and healing for those who were abused." I wish to thank all the parish and institutional leaders who have joined us in implementing the Charter over these past 13 years. Let us invoke God's healing love to comfort those who were harmed in any way by child abuse and to endow all of us with the prudence to carry on this important mission.

With every prayerful best wish, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert J. McManus". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend Robert J. McManus, S.T.D.
Bishop of Worcester