

Part One: Policies and Procedures

ARTICLE 2

Pastoral Support and Outreach

On Offering Pastoral Support and Outreach

USCCB, *Essential Norms* §3: ‘Each diocese/eparchy will designate a competent person to coordinate assistance for the immediate pastoral care of persons who claim to have been sexually abused when they were minors by priests or deacons.’

USCCB, *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, §1: “Through pastoral outreach to victims and their families, the diocesan/eparchial bishop or his representative is to offer to meet with them, to listen with patience and compassion to their experiences and concerns, and to share the ‘profound sense of solidarity and concern’ expressed by His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, in his Address to the Cardinals of the United States and Conference Officers’. This pastoral outreach by the bishop or his delegate is to also be directed to faith communities in which the sexual abuse occurred¹.

The Work of the Victims’ Assistance Coordinator

2.1 The Victims’ Assistance Coordinator offers pastoral support, outreach, and professional assistance to persons who report having been abused as children by clergy or diocesan or parish personnel or volunteers, to their family members, and to parishes, parish schools, and diocesan institutions affected by a complaint of sexual abuse of a minor.

2.1.1 The Bishop will normally extend an offer to meet personally with persons who claim to have been abused as children or young people by clergy or diocesan or parish personnel or volunteers, as well as with their family members. This offer may be made through the Victims’ Assistance Coordinator.

2.1.2 The pastoral support offered by the Victims’ Assistance Coordinator includes referrals for pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, parish consultation, and retreats.

2.1.3 The outreach conducted by the Victims’ Assistance Coordinator will include disseminating information to increase awareness and understanding of the prevention, identification, and treatment of sexual abuse of minors.

¹ See Pope John Paul II, *Address to the Cardinals of the United States and Officers of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* (23 April 2002).

2.1.4 When the person who is reported to have been abused is under age eighteen (18) the offer of assistance will be made to the parent or guardian of that person.

On Professional Assistance to be offered

2.2 The professional assistance offered by the Victims' Assistance Coordinator includes referrals and funding for psychological counseling with a licensed mental health professional.

2.2.1 The standard authorization will support twenty-five sessions of therapy. If, after that time, additional sessions are necessary, a written request from the treating clinician is requested. Requests for ancillary therapies and requests for a psychotropic medication or evaluation will be considered on an individual basis.

2.2.2 The Victims' Assistance Coordinator maintains a list of treatment providers so that a person seeking counseling may choose a licensed mental health professional if a referral is needed. Alternatively, the person may already be in therapy or decide to seek a therapist without referral assistance from the Victims' Assistance Coordinator.

The Initial Interview and Principles of Confidentiality

2.3 The Victims' Assistance Coordinator is to maintain information that is obtained from persons seeking support or assistance in a confidential manner to the extent allowable by law.

2.3.1 At the initial interview, persons seeking support or assistance may be accompanied by a friend or family member. Meetings will take place at the office of the Victims' Assistance Coordinator or at a mutually agreed upon location.

2.3.2 The purpose of the initial interview is to listen to the individual who brings a report of sexual abuse of a minor and to be guided by the needs he/she presents. In the initial interview, the Victims' Assistance Coordinator or designated staff member who conducts the interview will discuss the nature of confidentiality and its limitations. The VAC/staff member will record only limited information. The VAC/staff member will not record a detailed narrative of the complaint.

2.3.3 When required by civil law, the VAC/staff member will explain the legal requirements for reporting sexual abuse of minors to civil authorities, including that staff members are mandated reporters for child abuse and neglect.

2.3.4 When the person presents a danger of harm to self or others, it will be necessary for the VAC/staff member to disclose this information. When feasible, the person will be informed of this disclosure.

2.3.5 At the conclusion of the initial interview, the person seeking assistance will receive a copy of the materials that will comprise his/her record.

Filing a Complaint with Civil and Church Authorities

2.4 The Victims' Assistance Coordinator or other staff member who conducts the interview will ask the person reporting sexual abuse of a minor by a cleric or one of the diocesan or parish personnel or volunteers whether he/she wishes to make a formal complaint to Church authorities, explaining that such a complaint is necessary for the Church to investigate the actions of clergy or parish or diocesan personnel and volunteers.

2.4.1 The VAC/staff member will ensure that this person understands that the offer of pastoral and psychological assistance is not contingent upon willingness to file a complaint and that no information gathered by the Victims' Assistance Coordinator or his/her delegate will be entered into an investigation by the Church without the permission of the person making the complaint or his or her guardian.

2.4.2 When the person chooses to file a complaint, the VAC/staff member will ask him/her to sign a release requesting that the Victims' Assistance Coordinator forward the complaint to the Moderator of the Curia.

2.4.3 When an adult reports having been abused as a child, the VAC/staff member will explain that he/she has the right to make a report to the appropriate civil authorities of the place where the abuse allegedly occurred. When the person does not choose to make such a report, even anonymously, the VAC/staff member will not file such a report without first obtaining the informed consent of the adult (USCCB, *Charter*, §4).

2.4.4 When a person reports sexual abuse of a minor by a member of the clergy or a diocesan or parish employee or volunteer who is currently ministering, working, or serving in the Diocese or one of its parishes or parish schools but does not wish to make a formal complaint for the purposes of an ecclesiastical investigation, the VAC/staff member will inform the Moderator of the Curia that an anonymous allegation has been received by the Victims' Assistance Coordinator. The VAC/staff member will explain to the person that the Diocese cannot normally investigate an anonymous allegation and will attempt to help the person address his/her concerns about participating in an ecclesiastical investigation.

2.4.5 When requested, the Victims' Assistance Coordinator will accompany a complainant to an interview with Church investigators. To the extent possible, such interviews will be conducted in a setting that is comfortable to all parties.

Assistance to Diocesan Institutions

2.5 In cooperation with the Victims' Assistance Coordinator, the Bishop will arrange for pastoral outreach to a parish, parish school, or diocesan institution affected by a complaint of sexual abuse of a minor by clergy or diocesan or parish personnel or volunteers.

2.5.1 The Bishop will ensure that appropriate assistance is offered to the parish, parish school, or diocesan institution, which may include such resources as spiritual and psychological counseling. The Bishop may visit personally or designate a team of persons to meet with the parish, parish school, or institution. This team may include representatives of the diocesan or parish administration and other professionals.

2.5.2 The parish council or equivalent body may be involved in designing a process that will assist the parish or other institution.

2.5.3 The Moderator of the Curia will oversee communications with a parish, parish school, or diocesan institution affected by a complaint of sexual abuse of a minor. He will offer timely and pastorally appropriate information, in accord with these policies and procedures regarding such communications (Article 4).