



The Roman Catholic Diocese of Fresno

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DIOCESE OF FRESNO MOVES FORWARD WITH FIRST PHASE OF INDEPENDENT REVIEW

FRESNO, CA
THE MOST REVEREND ARMANDO X. OCHOA, D.D.

On August 16 and again on December 6, 2018, I released public statements in response to the report of sexual abuse cases that involved Pennsylvania. These revelations have understandably raised nationwide awareness and cultivated very serious concerns, in addition to the impact it continues to have on victim-survivors. Today, I want to personally reiterate what I previously stated:

"I stand firm in my conviction that all clergy must live out their lives as ordained ministers with integrity. As bishop, I have fully accepted my responsibility to address any serious matter that knowingly puts at risk any of the souls entrusted to my pastoral care and will continue to do so."

Over the past four months I have been in extensive dialogue with the Diocesan Review Board that focuses on the protection of children, youth and vulnerable adults; the College of Consultors, representing the clergy; and, the Sensitive Issues Committee which is staffed by lay employees and our diocesan attorney. Those who speak as victims' advocates are among these advisory resources and have been central to the dialogue. This process could not be rushed. It has provided me with a variety of trustworthy perspectives and recommendations and I have great confidence in the depth of input I have received.

The consensus of this collaboration has led me to the conclusion that a thorough review of all clergy files (priests and deacons) in the possession of the Diocese of Fresno should be conducted dating back to 1922 when the territory was the Diocese of Monterey-Fresno. Although labor intensive, it is essential that the current administration is fully aware of any record of sexual abuse, no matter how much time has passed.

To ensure that this task is objectively completed in a timely manner, we will undergo an extensive review of our clergy files in the spring of 2019 to be conducted by former FBI Executive Assistant Director, Dr. Kathleen McChesney, of Kinsale Management Consulting. This will be Phase One and will be funded by diocesan reserves. Donations received for the Annual Bishop's Appeal are restricted funds that will continue to provide support as designated for Religious Formation and Education, Family Life Ministry, Youth and Young Adult Ministries, and Vocations to the Priesthood. Donations to parishes and Catholic schools will not be a funding source.

Phase Two will focus on analyzing the outcome of Phase One. At that time, the format for the release of names of accused clergy will be established and how they will be categorized. Again, this will

include the participation of the Diocesan Review Board, College of Consultors and Sensitive Issues Committee. Victims' advocacy will again be a crucial part of the decision making process.

The Diocese of Fresno will release another statement upon completion of the file review so the public will be informed that Phase One has been completed and Phase Two is beginning. An estimated time for the release of names of accused clergy will then be determined.

In the meantime, our Office of Communications will prepare a special edition of the diocesan newspaper, *Central California Catholic Life* that will highlight how the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People has been effectively implemented since its inception in 2003, building on the precautionary measures that were already in place. Verification of compliance through an independent audit will also be included to ensure that every reasonable action is being taken to keep our young and vulnerable adults safe while entrusted to our care. This publication will be available on the diocesan website.

I was deeply moved during the gathering of bishops from all over the United States that took place in Mundelein, Illinois, in early January which focused solely on the impact of abuse and its mishandling over the decades. I would like to close with the prayer we shared during our time together and that I continue to offer privately each day:

Loving God,

Turn your ear to the cries of your sons and daughters who seek healing for Your Church.

We are heartbroken. We are bruised. We are hurting.

In these days we again wrestle with understanding the heinous acts of abuse by those entrusted with shepherding Your flock.

Ease our troubled hearts. Mend our broken spirits. Be "ever present in our distress."

Merciful Lord, send your Healing Spirit to our brothers and sisters who have endured pain and abuse physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Comfort their weary spirits. Soothe their pain. Grant them justice.

May our eyes be opened to see your image in these wounded members of Your Church.

Give us all courage to act and speak up on behalf of the most vulnerable.

Rush the winds of the Spirit to scatter the darkness of sin. Pour forth Your healing Spirit to renew our trust and hope in You, who are our refuge and our strength.

We ask this through Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

I want to express my appreciation for the media present here today. Your assistance in keeping the general public informed is greatly appreciated.