

Off the Top of My Head...

In last week's bulletin, I shared my thoughts and feelings about the "credible allegations" against Archbishop (formerly Cardinal) Theodore McCarrick of sexual abuse during his ministry as priest and bishop.

Since then, we have learned of 300 cases of credible allegations of sexual abuse by clergy in six dioceses in Pennsylvania, over the past 70 years. I still need to learn more about these reports before responding, but meanwhile, I would like to share some of the current measures in place in the U.S. Church and our diocese that are intended to ensure a safe environment for minors.

The Diocese of Lafayette in Indiana and its parishes regularly share information on how to report a suspected incident of sexual abuse by clergy or church personnel or volunteers. The most important phone number to know is the Child Protective Services Hotline, 800-800-5556. Other information is published in our bulletin regularly. Under Indiana law, it is a criminal act not to make such a report. This law applies to all adults without exception.

Criminal background checks are conducted for all potential and current parish (including school) employees and all volunteers who have regular contact with children. The Diocese also conducts checks on all priests and seminarians.

There is a diocesan code of conduct for clergy, employees, and volunteers, which covers common-sense behavior in the presence of minors, as well as online practices. We are also required to participate in child protection training on a regular basis.

If an allegation of sexual abuse by a priest or deacon against a minor is judged by the Diocesan Review Board to be credible, or "worthy of belief," he is to be removed permanently from church ministry. He could be dismissed from the clerical state ("laicized") if the case so warrants. Part of the review process includes the immediate notification of civil authorities if the alleged victim is a minor.

This information is not presented as a way of distracting our information from the terrible abuse that has already taken place in the Church, or the attempts to cover it up. It may or may not be reassuring to learn this information. In any case, I am sharing it simply so that parishioners will be informed. For all the available information, go to the "Protecting God's Children" page on our diocesan website, <https://dol-in.org/safe-environment-1>.

Fr. Tom Metzger  
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