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# Report to the Diocese

Dear Friends in Christ,

Much has already been written about the clergy sexual abuse scandal. The release of data compiled for the period from 1950 through 2002 in the John Jay Report, commissioned by the National Review Board, will again focus on the national scope of this problem.

While it is important to understand and appreciate the national data, it is also important to focus on our experience in the Diocese of Buffalo during the same 53-year period. That is why I want to share our statistical data with you.

In our Diocese, complaints have been made against a very small segment of the clergy. Between 1950 and 2002, there were 2,046 clergy assigned to the Diocese of Buffalo. During the 53-year period of the John Jay study, 93 complaints of sexual abuse were made against 53 members (2.6%) of the clergy in our diocese, with the majority of the accusations involving incidents that allegedly took place 20, 30, and as many as 40 years ago. Many of these accusations could not be proven or disproven because they were made long after the alleged incidents, but that did not stop us from offering counseling to those who made accusations.

It is important for you to know that none of the clergy accused remain in active ministry. Most of the accusations involved clergy who died before the accusations were made or who left active ministry before being accused. In addition, some clergy have been removed from active ministry in accord with diocesan policy.

You also should know that between 1950 and 2002, the Diocese of Buffalo paid \$670,000 for counseling and associated costs in connection with these cases. None of the money paid out during this time period came from the Catholic Charities Appeal or the Bishop's Fund for the Faith. The money was provided from insurance reimbursement and general diocesan

operating expenses.

While one case of sexual abuse is too many, it is clear that our diocesan policy dating back to 1990 has had a significant, positive impact on our ability to educate our clergy, employees and volunteers on the warning signs of sexual abuse. In fact, almost all complaints involved conduct alleged to have occurred before our policy was in effect.

Again, I offer my sincerest apologies to victims of sexual abuse and their families. While we cannot change the past, we can hope that incidents of sexual abuse will not be repeated.

Toward that end, current diocesan policy calls for the removal from ministry of any priest or deacon, "When even a single act of sexual abuse of a child by a priest or deacon is admitted or is established after an appropriate process in accord with canon law."

We have also taken a number of proactive steps to ensure the safety of children and young people in the Diocese of Buffalo.

In light of the 2002 Charter and Essential Norms, the 1990 diocesan policy was updated. Now called The Diocesan Policy Relating to Child Abuse and Sexual Abuse of a Child, the policy has been distributed throughout the diocese and published in the Western New York Catholic, the official newspaper of the diocese. The policy also is available on [the diocesan website](#).

A ten-member diocesan review board has assisted the bishop and is now assisting the diocesan administrator in dealing with cases of sexual and physical abuse of minors by priests, deacons or other diocesan personnel.

Jacqueline Joy, is the victim assistance coordinator for the diocese. Her job is to coordinate the immediate pastoral care of persons who claim to have been sexually abused as minors by clergy or other church personnel. Ms. Joy is a licensed clinical social worker with a master's degree in social work from the State University of New York at Buffalo. Currently an employee of Catholic Charities, Ms. Joy has been involved in social work for about 20 years. She spent 10 years working in nursing homes and then began providing mental health counseling with Catholic Charities in 2008, counseling victims of all types of abuse. Anyone who wishes to file a complaint of sexual abuse should contact Ms. Joy at 716-895-3010. Written complaints can be sent to Ms. Joy at Catholic Charities, 425 Main St., Dunkirk, NY 14048. Her email address is [jacqueline.joy@ccwny.org](mailto:jacqueline.joy@ccwny.org).

Employees and volunteers of the diocese who work with children or young people are now required to sign and abide by a 19-point Code of Conduct. In addition, mandatory sexual

abuse awareness training sessions are being conducted throughout the eight-county diocese.

Since October of last year, 125 training sessions have been conducted. Another 80 sessions are scheduled through April. To date, about eight thousand people have completed the training.

Criminal background checks on diocesan priests have been completed. Similar background checks will be conducted for other diocesan employees and volunteers. The diocese has signed an agreement with the district attorneys of the eight counties of Western New York regarding reporting cases of sexual abuse. And we announced last month that the diocese is in full compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Essential Norms for Dealing With Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons. Information from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on current audits is available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/audits.cfm>.

We remain vigilant in our commitment to protect our most precious assets, our children.

During these days of Lent, I encourage you to join me in prayer for all who have suffered as a result of this tragedy. Let us pray that all might experience healing, reconciliation and peace.

Sincerely,  
Rev. Msgr. Robert J. Cunningham  
Diocesan Administrator  
February 27, 2004

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