

Frequently Asked Questions

How the Diocese of Kansas City–St. Joseph protects children, reports abuse and assists victims of sexual abuse by members of the clergy, employees, and volunteers

What are the commitments of Bishop Johnston and the Diocese with regard to allegations of sexual abuse of a minor and protecting God’s children?

- No priest or deacon currently in active ministry has been credibly accused of child sexual abuse.
- We report EVERY allegation of child sexual abuse to civil authorities.
- We fully cooperate with their investigation.
- We have an Independent Review Board that reviews available evidence collected by the Diocese, Ombudsman and civil authorities regarding allegations of child sexual abuse by clergy. This Board is made up of mostly lay women and men volunteers with professional expertise in areas such as social work, criminal law, psychology, counseling, law enforcement, children’s advocacy, etc.
- All clergy, employees and volunteers who work with children are carefully screened, including background checks.
- All clergy, employees and volunteers who work with children are trained to identify inappropriate behavior, grooming techniques used by abusers, and how to report suspicious behavior or abuse.
- Each and every allegation of sexual abuse of a minor is taken seriously.

How does one report a suspicion of sexual abuse of a minor perpetrated by a cleric, employee or volunteer?

The Ombudsman receives and investigates allegations of sexual abuse of a minor or a vulnerable adult perpetrated by an employee, volunteer, priest or deacon in the Diocese of Kansas City–St. Joseph. The Ombudsman receives and investigates reports of suspicious behavior by an employee, volunteer, priest or deacon in the Diocese of Kansas City–St. Joseph.

When you have reasonable cause to suspect sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult, you must call:

1. The Missouri Child Abuse Hotline at **1.800.392.3738**, if the victim is under the age of 18
2. The Missouri Adult Abuse and Neglect Hotline at **1.800.392.0210**, if the victim is a vulnerable adult
3. Local law enforcement or 911 if you believe the person is in immediate danger

Then, you are asked to report to the Ombudsman, **816.812.2500**, if the suspected abuser is an employee, volunteer, priest or deacon in the Diocese of Kansas City–St. Joseph.

Is Bishop Johnston willing to meet with victims of sexual abuse?

Bishop Johnston regularly meets with victims and survivors of sexual abuse. He continues to welcome the opportunity to meet personally, hear their stories and offer support to them in their journey toward healing.

In addition to the policies, how does the Diocese prevent child sexual abuse?

Through the diocesan [Office of Child and Youth Protection](#), the Diocese conducts Safe Environment training workshops on methods of preventing, recognizing and reporting child abuse and sexual misconduct. All clerics must be current on safe environment requirements prior to assignment for ministry. Employees and volunteers who have contact with minors of the Diocese, parishes, schools, missions or other institutions must attend these workshops.

Additional information about adult Safe Environment training in the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph can be found on the webpage for the Office of Child and Youth Protection at kcsjocyp.org. All minors in parish or school-sponsored programs are offered age and developmentally appropriate safe environment training on an annual basis. We believe that providing education to adults and children in the diocese helps to create a culture of safety and this knowledge helps to prevent future abuse.

What is the Process when Sexual Abuse of a Minor Allegations Against Clergy are Made?

The following are elements of the process of addressing allegations of sexual abuse by clergy:

- The Independent Ombudsman ensures allegations are immediately reported to legal authorities.
- The Diocese and Ombudsman cooperates fully with any law enforcement investigation.
- The Ombudsman works in partnership with the diocesan [Victim Services](#) Coordinator so that care and outreach can be offered when an allegation is made.
- After a prompt internal initial investigation, if the allegation meets a preliminary threshold of plausibility, the accused cleric is relieved of his assignment and placed on administrative leave. He may not live at a parish, present himself as a priest/deacon, and may not publicly perform sacraments while the investigation proceeds. Efforts are made to protect the reputation of the accused in these initial stages of the investigation and pursuit of the truth.
- The diocesan investigation is conducted by the Ombudsman. Care is taken to avoid any interference with the law enforcement investigation. The investigation may be done by working in conjunction with law enforcement if possible, or by deferring the diocesan investigation until the law enforcement investigation is complete.
- When the diocesan investigation is complete, all evidence is considered by the Independent Review Board (IRB), which is made up of mostly lay women and men with professional expertise in fields such as social work, civil law, psychology, counseling, law enforcement, children's advocacy, etc.
- The IRB assesses whether the allegation is believed credible and then advises the Bishop regarding their opinion on the accused cleric's suitability for ministry.
- No cleric with a credible allegation of sexual abuse against a minor may return to ministry.
- The assessment by the IRB is independent of that by law enforcement. The IRB may find an allegation to be credible even when law enforcement determines that evidence is not sufficient for a criminal prosecution as there exists differing standards and criteria.

- If an act of child abuse by the accused cleric is admitted or established, the Bishop will take appropriate canonical action, up to and including laicization.

What is an Ombudsman?

The traditional meaning of an Ombudsman is a liaison between an organization and its members to resolve complaints. The [Ombudsman](#) for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph serves to ensure full reporting and cooperation with law enforcement and to help promote transparency and accountability of investigations into allegations of sexual abuse of a minor by an agent of the Church. The Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph was the first to create the Ombudsman role as applied to reporting and investigation of sexual abuse of a minor. See the [OCYP annual report](#) for Ombudsman statistics.

Are lay people involved in reviewing accusations? What is the Independent Review Board (IRB)?

When an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor is received, lay people are involved in each step of the process, including reporting the allegation to law enforcement, conducting the diocesan investigation and reaching out with assistance to the individual making the allegation.

In addition, based on the national [Charter and Essential Norms](#) approved in 2002, all dioceses are required to have a review board that functions as a confidential consultative body to the Bishop. This board assesses allegations of sexual abuse of minors and reviews diocesan policies and procedures for dealing with sexual abuse of minors.

The assessment by the IRB is independent of that by law enforcement. The IRB may find an allegation to be credible even when law enforcement determines that evidence is not sufficient for a criminal prosecution as there exists differing standards and criteria. IRB members are listed on the website under the [Office of Child and Youth Protection](#).

Are there priests now serving in our diocese with credible allegations of sexual abuse of a minor against them?

No. The Diocese has consistently followed the [Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and Essential Norms](#) issued in 2002, which states that no cleric may serve in ministry following a credible allegation of sexual abuse against a minor.

If the allegations are found to be credible and substantiated, will you fire the priest?

If an allegation of child sexual abuse against a priest is found to be credible and substantiated, he will not return to ministry. Such individuals may also face criminal prosecution.

The ordination of a priest binds him and his bishop in a special relationship, which normally continues for the entirety of a man's service. Therefore, the Bishop, while ensuring a priest is never again put in a position in which he could harm a child, is canonically responsible to provide for his basic needs. However, in some circumstances, based on the gravity of the priest's actions, the relationship between a priest and bishop can be radically changed. This process is called dismissal from the clerical state and is more popularly referred to as a "laicization" and results in restoring a man to the lay state.

What happens to an accused priest if the allegations are found not to be credible?

If allegations against a priest are found not to be credible and substantiated by civil authorities the Independent Review Board, and the Bishop, and if there are no other impediments or determination of a non-suitability to his ability to serve in ministry, then the priest is restored to full ministry and actions are taken that will attempt to fully restore his good name.

What are the repercussions for priests found to have substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of a minor?

1. Administrative leave
2. Removal from ministry
3. Dismissal from the clerical state, also known as laicization
4. Prayer and penance

What happens when a bishop is accused?

In May 2019, the Holy Father established new universal law for the global Church to protect children and vulnerable people from the evils of clergy sexual abuse, while holding all members of the clergy accountable regardless if they are the direct abuser or involved in the coverup of such crimes. These norms add more layers of response to The Charter that has already been implemented by the American Church since 2002. Click here for more information about the [Motu Proprio](#) and its implementation.

If a bishop in the state of Missouri is the subject an accusation the Archbishop of St Louis (the metropolitan) and the papal nuncio in Washington, DC are to receive the report and handle according to the protocol adopted by the USCCB.

Has the Diocese ever conducted a review of clergy personnel files?

The clergy personnel files were recently reviewed by an independent firm with expertise in forensic research, Fidelity Consultants LLC, whose team comprised of three former agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Their review specifically covered the years from the beginning of the diocese in 1956 to the present. Based on this audit, it is certain that no cleric with a credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor is serving in ministry in our diocese. After this audit was completed, the Diocese produced a list of clerics with substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of a minor. This list can be found at kcsjatholic.org.

Who checks to ensure the Diocese is following its procedures?

Currently, our diocese is audited annually by Stonebridge Business Partners of Rochester, N.Y., to ensure we are compliant with the [Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People](#). This audit looks at our practices and procedures for ensuring a Safe Environment.

Does the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph have insurance to address sexual misconduct cases?

As a standard practice since the early 1990s, the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph has included sexual misconduct insurance among its array of insurance coverages to help protect the donations, gifts, bequests and the like made to the Diocese for ministry and charitable works.

Are Bishop's Annual Appeal funds used in sex abuse settlements?

No. Funds provided for the Bishop's Annual Appeal are used for the purposes for which they are given and not in relation to claims of sexual abuse of minors. The Diocese has insurance policies in place to protect donor funds from lawsuits and/or claims.

What can I as a Catholic do during this difficult time?

During this time, it is easy to feel helpless, but there are many things we can do as Catholics that are productive:

- Increase your prayer life, spend more time reading Sacred Scripture and draw nearer to God during this time. In your prayer, please continue to remember all victims of child abuse and sexual misconduct. Pray for them and their families.
- Pray for those who have harmed others by sexual abuse, and their families as well.
- Pray for our priests, especially your parish priests, and offer encouragement to them, as they are saddened and angered by the tragic and evil actions of some priests and by church leaders who failed to protect those under their care.
- Share with friends and fellow parishioners the reality of all that the Diocese does to protect children and help victims in their healing process. Many are unaware of the extent to which our diocese works on behalf of the faithful, nor do some understand all that has changed following the 2002 Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.
- It is important that we continue our pastoral outreach to others, especially those most in need. Our service, charity and good works help to reveal the presence of Jesus, the Light who has conquered the darkness.
- We certainly can acknowledge our emotions and share our opinions in light of the issues within our Church. In the process, we must respect each other and let nothing divide us, so that we may live as members of God's holy family.
- Lastly, it is true that the present scandals are embarrassing and infuriating, but we must remain proud to be Catholic. Our Church was instituted by Jesus Christ Himself and remains rooted in Him and led by the Holy Spirit. Our faith is in Him Who experienced trial and suffering yet triumphed. Our faith has been handed on through trials, tribulations, martyrdoms, scandals and all sorts of sufferings endured by men and women who put their trust in God and His Church. We continue to do so as we ask God to show us the path we must take in order that this sort of tragedy never happens again.

"I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).