

THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF JACKSON

John Jay College Study

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The Catholic Diocese of Jackson (“the Diocese”) was originally established as the Diocese of Natchez in 1837, was renamed the Diocese of Natchez-Jackson, and assumed its current identity in 1977 when it was divided into what is now known as the Diocese of Biloxi and the Diocese of Jackson. The Diocese encompasses 65 counties in Mississippi, consists of 74 parishes and 19 schools. Currently, there are six deacons and 65 diocesan priests who serve a population of 51,347 registered Catholics. The Most Reverend Joseph N. Latino, who was installed as bishop in 2003, leads the Diocese.

The Diocese is dedicated to protecting children and promoting healing for those who have been hurt by the clergy misconduct. The Diocese recognizes the need to reestablish trust among clergy, laity and the general public.

Since the mid 1980s the Diocese has had a policy concerning child abuse investigation and reporting. The policy has undergone revisions and supplementation for the last two decades. The most recent revision occurred in October 10, 2003 reflecting additions suggested by the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People,” which was approved by the Bishops in Dallas, June 2002 and the “Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests and Deacons,” which was approved by Rome December 8, 2002.

Over the past twenty years, the Diocese has developed and implemented a safe environment program. The Diocese has publicized standards of conduct for priests and deacons, as well as diocesan employees, volunteers, and any other church personnel in positions of trust who have regular contact with children and young people. The Diocese is conducting background evaluations for all diocesan and parish personnel who have regular contact with minors. The Diocese has not transferred any priest or deacon who has had a credible allegation of sexual abuse lodged against him to another diocese for ministerial assignment or for purposes of residence. The bishop, or his delegate, and the major superiors of religious orders have coordinated their respective roles regarding issues of allegations of sexual abuse made against a cleric member. The Diocese has established screening and evaluative techniques in the selection of candidates for ordination and ongoing formation programs for priests.

As of December 1, 2003, the Diocese was found to be compliant with the provisions of the Charter and auditors charge with investigating diocesan cooperation and implementation issued four commendations:

“COMMENDATION 1 – For the appearance of Bishop Latino on a statewide televised panel discussion, which included the state coordinator of a major advocacy group, regarding the issue of sexual abuse of minors.

COMMENDATION 2 – For an excellent sexual abuse prevention policy, which has been in existence in the Diocese since 1986 and has been continually updated and improved.

COMMENDATION 3 – For the establishment of a review board in 1994 and the excellence of the composition and activities of the board.

COMMENDATION 4 – For the excellence of the Diocese’s cooperation with civil authorities in dealing with matters of sexual abuse of minors.”

Recently, the Diocese participated in a confidential study commissioned by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. This innovative survey was designed to provide a “descriptive study . . . of the nature and scope of the problem including statistics” on perpetrators and victims. Even though the names of the victims and the alleged perpetrators were not disclosed, because of the privacy rights of victims and the alleged perpetrator accusers, the Diocese insisted upon encryption of all information provided to the John Jay College. Pursuant to the instructions of the survey, the Diocese reported only information regarding diocesan priests since religious orders were to make their own report. A diocesan priest is ordained for ministry in a particular diocese and is subject to the bishop of that diocese. A religious order priest is ordained for a particular religious community and is subject to the religious superior of his order. Religious order priests serve in missions all over the country and world. When the John Jay study is released, it will include the total number of accused perpetrators and victims for the entire country.

The Diocese reported to John Jay College that between the years 1950 and 2002, 204 diocesan priests served in the Diocese of Jackson. The Diocese acknowledged that during this time period it received credible complaints of sexual misconduct with a minor against ten diocesan priests.

Although not requested in the John Jay survey, but in the spirit of transparency, during this 52 year period and outside this period, there were other claims lodged against diocesan priests, religious order priests, brothers, and priests of other dioceses serving within the Diocese of Jackson. The Diocese has become aware of six religious order priests who were accused of sexual misconduct with a minor and there have been other claims against brothers of religious orders. At least two allegations against priests were found to be incredulous and there was one inconclusive allegation. In addition there were claims against priests ordained by the Diocese of Jackson but serving in other dioceses.

Because of the heightened awareness, the Diocese has received a number of accusations by victims within the last 18 months. However, these claims allege conduct occurring for the most part during the 1960s and 1970s. One report was made of misconduct occurring in 1938. The most recent allegation of sexual misconduct allegedly occurred in the early 1980s. ***In other words, the reports of sexual misconduct by clergy to the Diocese and the lawsuits currently pending against the Diocese do not involve any alleged misconduct after the early 1980s.*** No diocesan priest, deacon or religious order priest or brother who is currently serving within the ministry of the Diocese of Jackson has had a credible allegation of sexual misconduct with a minor made against him.

In all instances, after receiving complaints, the Diocese has offered pastoral care to the victims making accusations. In circumstances where there were found to be credible allegations of sexual abuse, the Diocese has offered pastoral and psychological counseling. The Diocese's best calculation is that the out-of-pocket counseling and other direct aid cost was approximately \$95,978 from 1981 to July 2002. Detailed financial records prior to 1981 could not be found. During the same time period, the Diocese has expended \$13,679 in legal fees relating to sexual misconduct claims.

Bishop Latino and the Catholic Diocese of Jackson once again offer their apologies to those who have been victimized by clergy abuse. No group has suffered more than the victims of these crimes. The sins of a few have seriously damaged the trust that must exist between bishops and priests, bishops and the laity, and between priests and their parishioners. However, an overriding number of priests and bishops have faithfully served God's holy people and have lived a life of dedicated service to God and Church.