

Statement on the Grand jury Report on the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

We are deeply saddened and shocked by what the Attorney General has released today. We ask for prayers for all of the victims.

The sexual abuse of minors is an appalling sin and a crime. That is why the Diocese of Harrisburg has made strong and aggressive steps to combat it.

The Diocese of Harrisburg maintains a zero tolerance policy regarding sexual abuse. Any priest or deacon, employee or volunteer, who has committed even a single act of sexual abuse of a minor, whenever it occurred, is permanently removed from ministry.

The Diocese of Harrisburg is ever vigilant to make sure that children are protected. That is why when a report of possible abuse surfaces in the Diocese of Harrisburg we promptly relay it to public authorities fully and transparently.

Our efforts to protect youth go beyond what is required by the State of Pennsylvania. Additionally we have passed yearly audits by an independent firm to be sure that we are complying with standards set forth by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Since 2004 over 31,000 employees and volunteers in the Diocese of Harrisburg have taken and passed an online course that instructs them in how to recognize child abuse and how to report it to the proper public authorities. Each of those individuals has also been screened with multiple background checks.

The safety of children is always uppermost in our mind. We have taken many additional steps in recent years to ensure that children will be in a safe place when they are participating in a program in our parishes or schools. Our Safe Environment program helps them to recognize the steps they can take to keep themselves safe.

Approximately 50,000 children in the 15 counties served by the Diocese of Harrisburg in religious education classes (CCD) and in Catholic Schools have received Safe Environment training since 2005. (Grades 1, 5 and 9).

The diocese encourages any victim of sexual abuse to contact the appropriate authorities and to seek help immediately by calling the State Childline at 1-800-932-0313. The Diocese has a Victim's Assistance Coordinator who can be reached via a toll free hot line at 1-800-626-1608 or visit www.hbgdiocese.org/protect.