



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

From Bishop Stephen Berg
To the people of the Diocese of Pueblo
November 1, 2018
Solemnity of All Saints

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the news continues to unfold around tragic reports of criminal sexual abuse in our Church, we must continue to pray for those who have been violated and to strengthen our resolve that this must be ended. As a member of the Administrative Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I have been involved in some of the extensive consultations to ensure and enforce the accountability and transparency which must be demanded of Church hierarchy. On September 16, the Administrative Committee issued a statement on behalf of the bishops, pledging to “heal and protect with every bit of the strength God provides us.” (<http://www.usccb.org/news/2018/18-152.cfm>)

This statement encompasses four clear goals. First, to establish a third-party reporting system employing lay leadership which will address allegations of sexual abuse of minors or sexual misconduct with adults by bishops. Secondly, to address penalties for bishops who have been removed due to corroborated allegations of sexual abuse of minors. Third, to initiate a mandated Code of Conduct for bishops themselves. And, fourth, to call for a full investigation into the case of former Cardinal McCarrick. I wholeheartedly support each of these goals.

I want to assure everyone that since the early 1990’s, one decade before the Dallas *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* was introduced, the Diocese of Pueblo has promoted healing and put into place systems meant to ensure a safe environment for our children. We have mandated a zero tolerance policy, removing any priest or minister for any act of sexual misconduct with a minor. We immediately report any suspected child abuse to law enforcement and cooperate fully with them. Victims are immediately offered professional counseling. Children in our Catholic schools and parish religious education programs are given age appropriate instruction, under the program *The Circle of Grace*, that empowers them to detect, reject and report any improper advances. Since 2005 we have conducted 49,000 such training sessions with children. During that time we have also conducted 16,000 safe environment training sessions, including criminal background checks, with clergy, employees, and volunteers. In addition, the Diocesan Review Board, comprised of lay people from professional or personal backgrounds in the area of detecting sexual abuse, monitors all allegations of reported abuse to ensure that we are doing what we say we are doing. This board is composed of a judge, a law enforcement officer, a doctor, a probations officer, a mental health professional, and a victim. They operate fully under the guidelines of the *Charter* in accordance with local and national law for the protection of our children. Annual national audits, performed by the professional, independent *Stonebridge Group*, also help to ensure that we are doing

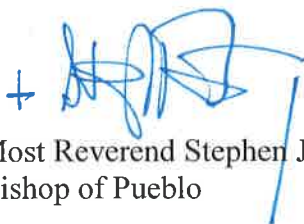
everything in compliance with the *Charter* to keep our children safe. The Diocese of Pueblo has passed every annual audit since their inception. While this list of initiatives is not exhaustive, it does demonstrate our commitment to keep our children safe. It is important that you know what we are doing and help to hold us accountable.

Two months ago I authorized a review of the historical files and as this is still a work in progress, I can share with you at this time that for over 10 years the diocese has not been named in any child sexual abuse lawsuit, nor has it settled any such claims out of court. This is not to say that the review is finished, but again I want you to know what we are doing. We will continue to build on our programs for safety for our children, and strengthen our resolve that this abuse must end, and that the Catholic Church will continue to grow as the model program for all institutions in this regard.

As I express my sorrow and reiterate my apology to all, I once again remind everyone that when it comes to sexual abuse, the Diocese of Pueblo has a zero tolerance policy. I urge any victims of clergy sexual abuse to notify the police and/or Joe'l DeYoung (jdeyoung@dioceseofpueblo.org) or Nancy Martinez(nmartinez@dioceseofpueblo.org), at 719-544-9861.

The US bishops are joining together in a commitment of prayer and reparation leading up to the bishop's general assembly, where we will be making critical decisions in response to the clergy sexual abuse crisis. With my brother bishops across the nation, I will be dedicating myself to seven days of intensified prayer and fasting, from Monday, November 5, through Sunday, November 11. If you feel called to do so, you are welcome to join me in praying for the healing and support of all victims of child abuse, for an end to it, and for the strength of the bishops to be holy shepherds in protecting our flock from all harm.

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend Stephen J. Berg, D.D.
Bishop of Pueblo