

Questions & Answers
December 23, 2004

Q. Was the Case Review Board “disbanded” and why is a new board being formed?

A. The Case Review Board has not been disbanded. It has concluded its work according to the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Essential Norms* approved in Dallas in 2002 by the U.S. bishops and the Vatican. The Case Review Board and the Policy Review Board are being reorganized into a single Archdiocesan Review Board. Because there are no cases pending, Archbishop Brunett has determined that the time is right to bring archdiocesan boards into conformity with the national model by consolidating the two existing boards into a single board. This reorganized board will be responsible for advising the Archbishop on policies and, when needed, reviewing any new cases that come forward.

Q. When will the new board be appointed by the Archbishop and will he include members of the old review boards?

A. The Archbishop has requested nominations for the reorganized board from members of the Case Review Board, the Policy Review Board and other consultative bodies. Nominations will be open through Jan. 30, 2005. The criteria established for board membership includes participation by bridge members from both the Case Review Board and the Policy Review Board. The main qualities we are looking for in review-board nominees are compassion for the victims, professional expertise, impartiality, objectivity and a commitment to due process.

Q. How can we be sure the reorganized Archdiocesan Review Board will continue to assure a safe environment for children?

The board will consist of legal, law enforcement and mental health professionals. The combined expertise and broad representation of the reorganized board will provide a basis for building on past efforts to provide a safe environment for children. The reconstituted board will continue in the tradition of the previous boards and begin its work by reviewing the policy recommendations made by the Case Review Board in its final report dated October, 2004.

Q. Is the Archdiocese backsliding in its commitment to protect children and heal victims of abuse?

A. The Archdiocese remains vigilant in its efforts to protect children and suggestions that it is backsliding are unfounded. Under Archbishop Brunett, each year the Archdiocese of Seattle has been more aggressive in its protection of children. The Archdiocese has been subjected to comprehensive audits by the National Review Board’s independent auditors twice in the past 14 months. The last audit was concluded last month. The independent

auditors, made up of former FBI investigators, were contracted by the USCCB and the Office for Child and Youth Protection and conducted a thorough onsite review of archdiocesan policies, programs and records as well as interviews with archdiocesan leaders and members of the Case Review Board. Both audits concluded that the Archdiocese is in full compliance with *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Essential Norms* approved in Dallas in 2002 by the U.S. bishops and the Vatican. The audit results acknowledge our past policies and education efforts and the extensive use of background checks for all employees. These practices will continue in the future and be subject to regular review by the newly reconstituted Archdiocesan Review Board.

Q. Why do the Case Review Board and the Archbishop hold differing positions on the release of priests' names while their cases are being considered by the Vatican?

A. Both the Case Review Board and the Archbishop agree that the names should be released. They differ on the timing. The Case Review Board believes an immediate release of the names will protect the public, show transparency in our processes and demonstrate sensitivity toward victims. The Archbishop agrees with these values. However, he also is committed to permanently removing offending priests from ministry. If the Archbishop were to release the names of the priests as the Case Review Board had suggested, he would jeopardize the only process in place that can assure their permanent removal from ministry.

In some of these cases, the allegations are disputed by the accused priest. To avoid jeopardizing the outcome of these canonical cases it is critically important to honor the processes set out in canon law and to follow procedures established by the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Essential Norms* approved in Dallas in 2002 by the U.S. bishops and the Vatican. The canonical process and the commitment of the church to bring justice to victims is the only recourse available in these decades-old cases. For this reason, Archbishop Brunett has disclosed the names of priests whose cases have been returned from Rome and has pledged to release the names of those priests under investigation only after the Vatican has taken definitive action.

Q. Have any of the accused priests' names been made public?

A. The Archbishop has received the recommendations of the Case Review Board regarding all 13 priests with allegations of child sexual abuse against them. A response from the Vatican is pending in some cases where the Case Review Board found the allegations credible and recommended that the accused priest be permanently removed from ministry, either through laicization or by permanently being barred from ministry. The Case Review Board found that three allegations could not be substantiated. The Vatican has taken definitive action in cases involving four accused priests and the Archbishop has disclosed their names. Outreach sessions also have been held in the parishes where those men served, and other victims, if there are any, have been encouraged to come forward. Four other priests names were previously disclosed in media reports.

Only two cases remain that involve priests whose names have not been made public. The priests in question have been removed from ministry, are being monitored and are cooperating with the terms of their administrative leave. Their names will be made public upon final disposition of the cases by the Vatican. Protecting children is our first priority and these priests pose no threat to our community.

Q. What were the circumstances surrounding the publication of the Case Review Board's final report.

A. The Case Review Board forwarded its report to Archbishop Brunett. The Archbishop said he would forward its policy recommendations to the Policy Review Board for their review prior to publication, and that he could not include the names of the accused priests in the published report. Members of the Case Review Board responded with a second request that the report be published. The Archbishop expressed his concern that including the names of all accused priests could jeopardize the canonical process for permanent removal of priests from ministry. After reaching agreement that the names would be removed to protect the process, the Archbishop prepared his reflections on the board's recommendations and the report was published. The board's report and the Archbishop's response to their recommendations can be found on the archdiocesan website at www.seattlearch.org.

Q. Are we taking the necessary steps to prevent future incidents of clergy child sexual abuse?

A. While the Archdiocese of Seattle has a record of compassion and outreach to victims spanning more than 15 years, Archbishop Brunett has stated publicly that we will never be done with the work of providing a safe environment for children. Policies and procedures established in the Archdiocese of Seattle follow best practices for youth-serving organizations and Archbishop Brunett is spearheading efforts to create a Child Sexual Abuse Institute as a permanent sign of our commitment to protect children and heal victims. All priests who formerly served in the Archdiocese of Seattle and had allegations of child sexual abuse against them have been removed from ministry.

Q. What about religious order priests?

A. Like our civil legal system, which limits the jurisdiction of courts and law enforcement, canon law limits the jurisdiction of bishops in issues involving priests who belong to a religious community. The Archbishop does not have canonical jurisdiction over religious priests. However, when he receives an allegation of child sexual abuse against a religious order priest, who is or has been in ministry in the Archdiocese, he immediately reports him to law enforcement authorities removes the priest from ministry and returns him to his Order. The religious superior has canonical jurisdiction to discipline the individual.

Q. Why don't priests accused of child sexual abuse face criminal charges?

A. The Archdiocese of Seattle's policy and practice is to report all allegations of child sexual abuse to local law enforcement. However, the vast majority of clergy child sex abuse cases occurred more than 30 years ago, well beyond the three-year statute of limitations for filing criminal charges. The most recent cases are more than 10 years old. As a result, when we bring these cases to the attention of law enforcement officials they are unwilling to pursue a criminal investigation. That's why the process established by the bishops is so important. For past victims of child sexual abuse, the process established by U.S. bishops under canon law is the only recourse outside civil courts to seek true healing and justice.

Q. Does the Archdiocese of Seattle face the prospect of bankruptcy like other dioceses around the country?

A. The Archdiocese of Seattle is committed to working with victims to provide pastoral care and healing. We also are working to reach fair and reasonable settlements with all those who have claims. If we continue to receive cooperation from our insurance carriers and settlement amounts continue to be fair and reasonable, we do not anticipate the need to file for bankruptcy protection as some other dioceses have. It is important to point out that no Parish Stewardship or Annual Catholic Appeal funds are being used to cover costs associated with settlements.

Q. How do individuals report allegations of clergy child sexual abuse?

A. The Archdiocese of Seattle is committed to working with victims by providing pastoral care and opportunities for reconciliation, healing and settlements. Anyone who has knowledge of child sexual abuse should contact the archdiocesan hotline at 1.800.446.7762, the confidential email address (*hotline@seattlearch.org*) or the appropriate civil authorities.

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