

# Monitoring Diocesan Efforts on Child Protection

## Developing an Assessment Tool

*Elia Marnik and Donna B. Doucette*

# Keep the Faith, Change the Church

## VOTF Child Protection

The obligation for all Christians to protect children flows from the ministry and example of Jesus Christ.

***Then children were brought to him that he might lay hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked him, but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."*** -- Matthew 19: 13-14

VOTF's Child Protection efforts focus primarily on education and on monitoring parish and diocesan child safety programs to ensure consistent, ongoing vigilance. Sexual abuse of children is both a human rights issue and a crime.

## **VOTF Actions on Child Protection**

**Beginning in 2002 ...**

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  - **Provided prevention training kits for both adults and children**

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- ✓ **Posted resources and links to critical information on our website**

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## Resources on VOTF Website: votf.org

Find Programs tab,  
choose Child Protection

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Child Protection Month

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## Child Protection

The obligation for all Christians to protect children flows from the ministry and VOTF's Child Protection efforts focus primarily on education and on monitoring safety programs to ensure consistent, ongoing vigilance. Sexual abuse of children is a rights issue; it's a crime. It's also endemic in many societies.

- Effective educational programs help adults prevent, recognize, and act on child sexual abuse.
- Critical review of community programs and evidence-based curricula help guide responsible actions to protect children.

We also recommend the establishment of Parish Safety Committees in every parish, the formation and activities of child abuse prevention teams in each parish, and

Protection of Minors

state's toll-free number

Sexual Abuse in Youth-Serving Organizations  
U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Protection of Children in the Catholic Community

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## VOTF Actions on Child Protection

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- ✓ Promoted prevention education and training:
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  - Provided prevention training kits for both adults and children
- ✓ Posted resources and link to critical information on VOTF website
- ✓ **Working Group members visited parish after parish to teach people how to recognize the signs of abuse and how to prevent opportunities for such abuse.**

## The work continues ...

### Next Step: Measuring Diocesan Standards

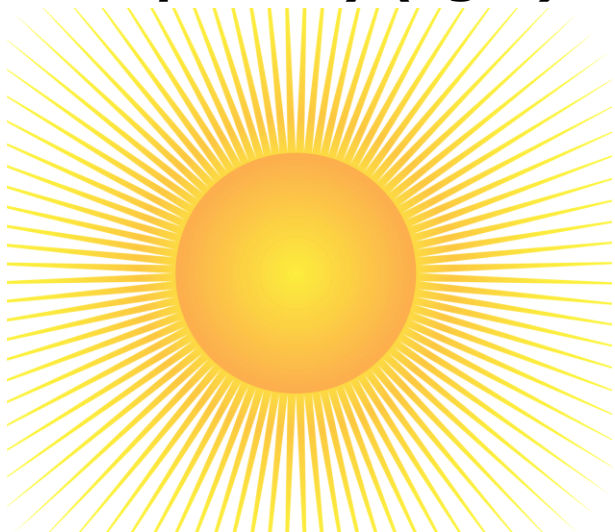
- ❖ What are diocesan standards?
- ❖ Who is covered?
- ❖ Are the standards posted?
- ❖ Who verifies adherence?
- ❖ How can compliance with these standards and norms be measured?
- ❖ Is there consistency of standards across all dioceses?



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**Two ingredients are needed to properly assess child protection programs in Church dioceses:**

***Transparency (light) ...***



***And the proper measurement***



***Self-reported audits are not enough.***

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## How the Current Diocesan Audits Work

- ❖ Parishes send reports to diocese—no uniform verifications; no uniform policies.
- ❖ Bishops (an assigned chancery official) collate the reports and fill out report forms sent by the auditor.
- ❖ Auditor selects a handful of dioceses to visit “this year.”
- ❖ Auditor creates report from the information each diocese sends.

This is NOT a search of all files, NOT a verification of parish data ...

Is this an audit, or is it a review?



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## The Result? An Ongoing Problem

*Excerpts from the letter of then-**NRB Chairman Francesco C. Casereo, Ph.D.**, to Most Reverend José H. Gomez, President, USCCB, March 7, 2020, regarding the 2019 annual compliance audit*

The number of allegations of sexual abuse within the Church saw a dramatic increase in the audit conducted for 2019. The overwhelming majority of these allegations were historical in nature ... [but] of the 4,434 allegations, 37 involved current minors which makes clear that **the sexual abuse of minors in the Church is not a thing of the past** ...

The current year's Annual Report highlights concerns also noted in previous years that speak to **the issue of complacency**. While not widespread, the **fact that in 25-30% of dioceses these recurring problems** are still evident points to lack of diligence that puts children's safety at risk. Although dioceses continue to do good work in creating cultures of protection and healing, the fact remains the Church's efforts will be measured based on the weakest links. **If one diocese is at risk, the whole Church is also at risk.**

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## How Do I Know MY Diocese Takes the Right Steps?

We tend to choose the “nothing in the news” approach to deciding everything is OK *now*, that no scandal = no problem. That approach is written in sand. **It won't tell you:**

- ❖ Does your diocese meet the standards for child protection?
- ❖ Did your parish check criminal record backgrounds on all clergy, teachers, and youth workers?
- ❖ What is the code of conduct?



VOTF's Protecting Children project will answer those questions and more, ranking each diocese on its Child Protection efforts.

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## Inherent Obstacles to Measuring Child Protection

- ❖ Diocesan policies and requirements for child protection **varied**, especially in the earlier years of this century.
- ❖ The only generally accepted standard in the U.S. Church for child protection has been the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (Dallas Charter), which relies primarily on **self-reporting**.
- ❖ Abuse happens at the **local level**, exactly the micro-level where outside monitors lack sufficient access and resources to measure effectiveness of programs.
- ❖ Parishioners believe “**it can’t happen here**; I know all these people,” which stalls efforts at local implementation.

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## Building a Better Monitoring Option—Part 1

**Take the steps available. Then improve them.**

- ❖ Use the wisdom and knowledge of child protection specialists and researchers to identify the key factors to measure.
- ❖ Start with the two pillars now accepted by the bishops as standards:
  - The Dallas Charter, which includes requirements regarding child protection standards.
  - Protocols dioceses must follow to satisfy Pope Francis's *motu propria* in the Apostolic Letter *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, which sets out provisional (three years) norms for the universal Church on reporting within the Church hierarchy (Congregation of the Faith).

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## **Pope Francis, An Apostolic Letter issued *Moto Proprio***

May 29, 2019, to go into effect on June 1, 2019

### ***Vos estis lux mundi***

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden."  
(MT 5:14) Our Lord Jesus Christ calls every believer to be a shining example of virtue, integrity and holiness. All of us, in fact, are called to give concrete witness of faith in Christ in our lives and, in particular, in our relationship with others.

... Our Lord Jesus Christ calls every believer to be a shining example of virtue, integrity and holiness ... The crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, cause physical, psychological and spiritual damage to the victims and harm the community of the faithful. In order that these phenomena, in all their forms, never happen again, a continuous and profound conversion of hearts is needed, attested by **concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the Church ...**

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## Building a Better Monitoring Option—Part 2

- ❖ Use rankings to compare dioceses: the VOTF Financial Transparency scorecards led to bishops expecting their CFOs to meet the standards we cited.

*Bottom line: "If you measure it, they will pay attention."*

- ❖ Publicize the rankings and engage parishioners in checking local programs to ensure compliance with standards that afford maximum protection for children from potential abusers.





## Evaluating Diocesan Child Protection: 10 Factors

1. Policy
2. Code of Conduct
3. Reporting of Abuse
4. Background Checks
5. Prevention Education & Training
6. Contact Information
7. Audit Reporting
8. Review Boards
9. Publication of Names of Clergy Accused of Abuse
10. Victim Assistance

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## Assigning Points to the Top Factors

1. Policy
2. Code of Conduct
3. Reporting of Abuse
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### **5. Prevention Education & Training**

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On a 100-point scale, these two areas—Prevention Education & Training, and Review Boards—will account for 40 to 50% of the total score ... They are that important.

## **Prevention Education & Training**

Without training, even the best religion teacher, parishioner, church secretary, sacristan, priest may not recognize subtle signs of grooming or the markers indicating abuse.

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## Prevention Education & Training

Without training, even the best religion teacher, parishioner, church secretary, sacristan, priest may not recognize subtle signs of grooming or the markers indicating abuse.

- ❖ Dioceses must ensure that **all personnel and volunteers** receive training—and then verify that they do.
- ❖ Dioceses must ensure that **all children and youth** in Church-sponsored activities receive prevention training.

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## Review Boards

Independent lay reviewers are essential.

- ❖ **Who** are they? **What** are their credentials?
- ❖ Are the **majority lay people** not employed by the Diocese?
- ❖ Do they receive notice of **all abuse allegations**?

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## **Background Checks**

Criminal record checks are another key factor:

- ❖ Does the diocese website post information on who must undergo criminal history record checks?
- ❖ Does the list include all people who work or volunteer in the diocese and come in contact with children? Are these record checks conducted annually?
- ❖ Are members of religious communities covered? What about international priests and those temporarily assigned to parishes?
- ❖ Who is responsible for conducting those background checks?
- ❖ And what happens if those background checks turn up a criminal record?

Overall, the efforts a diocese makes in this category will account for about 15% of their overall scores.



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## Policy and Code of Conduct

Under **Policy**, we look at how hard the Diocese works to inform everyone about its Child Protection or Safe Environment policy.

- ❖ Do they post it on their website?
- ❖ Does it require compliance both at the diocesan and the parish levels?
- ❖ How easy is it to find the information? A diocese could have the best, most encompassing protection policy in the world, but if no one can find it, or if it's buried so far in the website it takes a research genius to locate it, it may as well not exist.

Closely related are the questions we ask in the **Code of Conduct** category:

- ❖ Do they post it on their website?
- ❖ Do they post the code required for volunteers?

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## **Abuse Reporting**

In this area, we ask if the diocesan website provides information on the process for reporting abuse.

- ❖ Does the website explicitly direct people to report abuse to law enforcement or civil authorities?
- ❖ Does the website describe the process for reporting complaints against bishops for abuse or for concerns about how they handle abuse complaints?

## **Contact Information**

- ❖ Does the diocese post information about how to reach their office of Child Protection or Safe Environments?
- ❖ Are there links and other contact information on the diocesan web site for reporting child abuse complaints?

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## **When Problems Occur**

Two categories on the Child Protection worksheet focus on what happens when child sex abuse by clergy occurs:

### **Publication of the Names of Clergy Accused of Abuse:**

- ❖ Has the diocese posted such a list on its web pages, and does it cover both living and deceased clergy and bishops?
- ❖ Does the list also include credibly accused laicized or dismissed clergy and bishops?

### **Victim Assistance**

- ❖ Does the diocese website post contact information for the Victim Assistance Coordinator?
- ❖ Does the diocese provide pastoral and counseling services for survivors, their families, and parishes, and do they post this information on the website?

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## Putting It Together: the Worksheet

8. Review Boards -- 20 points					
5c Does the website contain information about		2.5	Assign 1 point if for temporarily-		
4. Background Checks -- 15 points total					
4a Does the website post information on who		5	Award 1 pts each: Clergy;		
Date of search _____		Diocese Name: _____			
Researcher Name: _____					
Description	Possible Points	Awarded Points	Scoring Instruction	Researcher's Comment	
<b>1. Policy -- 10 points total</b>					
1a Is the Diocesan Child Protection or Safe Environments Policy posted on the Diocesan website?	3	_____			
1b Does the Diocesan website contain information on parish mandatory compliance with the Diocesan Abuse Prevention / Safe Environments Policy?	2	_____	(May be difficult to find.)		
1c How easy is it to find Child Protection policies on the home Diocesan webpage:	5	_____	Score: 5 if ONE click or on Homepage; 4 if need TWO clicks; 3 for THREE clicks; 2 for FOUR clicks; 1 for more than FOUR clicks.		
<b>2. Code of Conduct -- 5 points total</b>					
2a Is a Diocesan Code of Conduct for all clergy and lay employees posted on the website?	2.5	_____			
2b Is a Diocesan Code of Conduct for volunteers posted on the website?	2.5	_____			
<b>3. Reporting of Abuse -- 5 points total</b>					
3a Does the Diocesan website provide information on the Diocesan process for reporting abuse?	2	_____	Having a system is mandated in Moto Proprio 2019 to be in effect June 1 2020		
3b Does that website state that all suspected abuse must be reported to law enforcement or civil authorities?	2	_____	Having a system is mandated in Moto Proprio 2019* to be in effect June 1 2020.		
3c Does the website contain information for reporting complaints against bishops for abuse or concerns in dealing with abuse?	1	_____			

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## What's Next?

1. Provide worksheet to consultant and advisors for a final review.
2. Test the worksheet on 25 dioceses.
3. Collate and evaluate test results to verify that questions asked identify and properly assign values to each factor.
4. Notify U.S. bishops of the project and the evaluation period, which will be three months duration in the first or second quarter of 2021.
5. Report results at the October 2021 VOTF conference.



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## How You Can Help ...

1. Check your parish's child protection training and education practices. Do they at least match the diocese's policy?
2. Find out who runs background checks for your parish, and how often they are conducted.
3. Volunteer to help if your parish's child protection education and training don't meet standards.
4. Volunteer to help run VOTF's Child Protection study—we need people with good internet-search skills. Send an email requesting details to Committee chair Pat Gomez or one of the other Committee members.

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## Child Protection Working Group

- ❖ **Patricia Gomez**, Chair: Developmental and Counseling Psychologist, original member of VOTF Protection of Children Working Group, current VOTF Trustee
- ❖ **Mary Pat Fox**, Co-Chair: President, Voice of the Faithful
- ❖ **Margaret Roylance**, Co-Chair: VOTF Vice-President, original member of VOTF Protection of Children Working Group, and long-time Safe Environment trainer at her parish
- ❖ **Elia Marnik**: Principal Consultant at ElMar Educational Consulting Services, long-time advocate for child protection and abuse-prevention training, original member of VOTF Protection of Children Working Group, current VOTF Trustee
- ❖ **Larry Mulligan**, Esq.: (retired) mediation and arbitration lawyer at Smith, Haughey, Rice and Roegge in Grand Rapids MI; has served on the Protecting God's Children team in the Diocese of Grand Rapids; former VOTF Trustee
- ❖ **Donna Doucette**: VOTF Executive Director

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## Advisors to Child Protection Working Group

- ❖ **Barbara Thorp**, Consultant and POC Team Member: former Director of Pastoral Support and Child Protection in the Archdiocese of Boston (2002–2012) where she supervised the Office of Child Advocacy and the Office of Background Screening; currently consults with Catholic dioceses across the U.S. on child protection and victim assistance efforts
- ❖ **Dr. David Finkelhor**, Director at the Crimes Against Children Research Center, University of New Hampshire, Durham NH. Dr. Finkelhor is the recipient of numerous grants, including grants from the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, and the U.S. Department of Justice.
- ❖ **Dr. Lisa Jones**, Research Associate Professor at the Crimes Against Children Research Center, University of New Hampshire, Durham NH, Dr. Jones has conducted research on child victimization and evaluating national, state, and community-level prevention and intervention responses to youth victims. She has received numerous grants, has published more than 75 papers on child victimization, and speaks nationally and internationally on related topics.