



**Diocese of Saint Petersburg**  
***Office of the Bishop***

**Letter to the People of the Diocese of Saint Petersburg**  
**April 2025**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

In 2006 and 2011, my predecessor, Bishop Robert N. Lynch, issued a Letter to the People regarding the history and status of our ongoing efforts to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults in the Diocese of Saint Petersburg. By this type of open communication, our Diocese has been a model around the country for transparency and accountability. In fact, we have been selected to host the 2025 national Child and Youth Protection Catholic Leadership Conference. Additionally, for the Church in the United States, each April is recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Month. Therefore, I feel it is time to provide my own Letter to the People with current information on how our Diocese continues to prevent the sexual abuse of our vulnerable population and how we are responding to allegations of abuse. Following this letter is a one-page statistical summary of efforts to prevent sexual abuse in the Diocese of Saint Petersburg.

As your Bishop, the most important thing I can do is to take steps to ensure that we, as the Church here in the Diocese of Saint Petersburg, do everything reasonably possible to protect our children, youth, and vulnerable adults in our parishes, schools, and all other diocesan entities. Even one instance of abuse is one too many.

It is also important to say that with families, employees, volunteers, clergy, and religious working together on this critical issue, there has been a steep decline in the number of incidences and allegations. Nearly all allegations that have been received are at least 20 to 30 years old, and some are even older.

In 1996, Bishop Lynch established a policy to ensure fairness toward both the individual bringing forth the allegation of sexual abuse, as well as the clergy members against whom allegations have been made. Since then, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued its *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* in 2002, after which our diocesan *Policy for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults* was developed in 2003 and is regularly reviewed and updated, as needed.

When an allegation of sexual abuse against a priest or deacon is made, the party raising the allegation is encouraged to contact law enforcement. Once the civil authorities have

concluded their investigation of the complaint, an additional investigation is conducted by an independent investigator, contracted by the Diocese. Our diocesan Review Board, consisting of mostly lay members, reviews the results of this investigation and the process of how it was conducted to assure it was done in accordance with Diocesan Policy and that it was fair. Both the alleged victim and the accused clergy are given an opportunity to appear before the Review Board. In the case of allegations of sexual abuse against lay employees and volunteers serving in entities of our Diocese, the party raising the allegation is encouraged to contact law enforcement, and the matter will be referred to the appropriate diocesan office.

Upon conclusion of the investigation, and after hearing the alleged victim and accused clergy member, the Review Board recommends to me whether the allegation 1) seems to be true, 2) might be true but is not substantiated, or 3) seems to be false. After I receive the recommendation, I will issue a decision on whether to provide some form of assistance to the one who brought forth the allegation.

When an allegation seems to be true, our response is to offer compassionate care and assistance and to assist in the healing process. The priest or deacon against whom the allegation was made is then removed from ministry. As has been the practice in the past, I will continue to take every reasonable step to ensure that he does not return to ministry.

As always, I offer my heartfelt prayers for the victims/survivors of clergy and others who abused their trust and have violated our children and youth. We must continue to be vigilant. I encourage anyone harmed as a minor by someone in ministry to come forward by contacting law enforcement and/or our Victim Assistance Coordinator. His contact information is included on the following page.

Please know of my sincere apology to and concern for all victims of priests, deacons, and other Church leaders who have abused their trust. There is no amount of financial, emotional, or spiritual support that can erase the harm that has been done. As shepherd of the Diocese of Saint Petersburg, I will continue to listen to victims and their families, to ask forgiveness for the abuse they have endured, and to enact and update policies and procedures that help to prevent abuse from happening again.

As I pray for you and for all the faithful of our local Church each day, I am grateful for your prayers for me as I renew my commitment to provide and maintain a safe environment for all persons in the Diocese of Saint Petersburg. I ask that you continue to join me in this mission.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Gregory Parkes  
Bishop of Saint Petersburg

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION – Safe Environment and Victim Assistance

### Diocese of Saint Petersburg

#### Since the establishment of the Diocese of Saint Petersburg in 1968:

- **Over 7,500 priests** have served the people of God on either a temporary or stable full-time basis
- **10 priests** from the Diocese of Saint Petersburg have admitted to or in the judgment of the Diocese of Saint Petersburg, were credibly accused of actions that disqualify and prohibit them from working or volunteering with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in any parish, school, agency, institution, or other Catholic entity located within and under the administrative control of the Diocese of Saint Petersburg. A list of these priests may be found here ([LINK](#)).
- **98 allegations** against Priests of the Diocese of Saint Petersburg, of which **56** met the above standard. We have received **10** allegations that were determined as being false, and **32** that could not be substantiated.
- There have been **7 instances** of sexual misconduct with a minor involving **5 lay persons** serving in ministry. The names of our diocesan clergy and lay persons who have had credible allegations of sexual misconduct with a minor raised against them are published on the diocesan webpage under the Safe Environment Program Office [\[link\]](#).
- Over the past five years, **nearly 61,000** clergy members, staff members, educators, and all volunteers with the care, responsibility, and supervision of minors or vulnerable adults have completed the Safe Environment Program training, and
- **More than 59,000** have gone through the FDLE/FBI Level II background screening or have been re-screened. This number includes the more than **300 priests** and **115 deacons**, both active and retired, providing ministry throughout our diocese.
- Our Diocese, including all parishes and schools, has spent approximately **\$1,073,000** in the last five years to make sure this screening is comprehensive, and our children and vulnerable adults are protected.
- Since the report in May 2011, the Diocese has expended approximately **\$2,500,000** for settlements, and an additional **\$100,000** for counseling assistance to those who have been harmed as minors, as well as **\$95,000** in legal fees and costs.
- Since 1990, the total expended for settlements has been approximately **\$7,215,000**. Approximately 20% of this has been covered by insurance. **The remainder has been withdrawn from insurance reserves of the Diocese. We have never appealed for special funds or conducted our Catholic Ministry Appeal** (formerly Annual Pastoral Appeal) to cover these financial commitments.

#### Important phone contact information:

- Diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator, John Lambert, L.C.S.W.: 866-407-4505 or [jl@dosp.org](mailto:jl@dosp.org).
- Diocesan Safe Environment Office (Michael Craig, Director): 727-344-1611, ext. 5377
- Florida Department of Children and Families Abuse Registry Hotline: 800-962-2873
- Local Law Enforcement Agency: 911