



DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH
THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



**Letter to the Priests, Deacons, Consecrated Religious, and the Baptized Faithful
of the Diocese of Fort Worth**

from

Most Reverend Michael F. Olson, Bishop of Fort Worth

**in Solidarity with the Decisions of Texas Catholic Bishops to Release Names of Clergy
Credibly Accused of Sexual Misconduct with Minors**

October 10, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we read in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, Jesus placed before His disciples the example of a child as the most important member of His Kingdom as well as the measure by which He will judge us in our fidelity as His disciples. He also warns us of the judgment that awaits us if we, through acts of commission or omission, intentionally harm any child and die without authentic repentance (Matthew 18:1-7). Jesus preached His Gospel in the midst of a culture and imperial system that held children and the vulnerable as having no standing worthy of respect. In so doing, Jesus shows how central and essential the respectful care and protection of the child and vulnerable are to the mission that He has entrusted to His Church, a mission that continues in the contemporary world.

The Diocese of Fort Worth is committed to eradicating the evil of sexual abuse of minors. The protection of our children is a moral obligation and is of paramount importance to the Diocese of Fort Worth. When it comes to the protection of children, complacency is unacceptable. The Diocese of Fort Worth has taken and will continue to take affirmative steps to ensure the safety of our children.

THE CATHOLIC CENTER



DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



In that regard, publicly identifying clergy and religious brothers and sisters who are the subjects of credible allegations of sexual abuse against a minor serves an important role in eradicating the evil of sexual abuse and in helping the Diocese to identify and assist those who have suffered from abuse. In 2005, the Diocese of Fort Worth first publicly identified priests who were the subjects of credible allegations of sexual abuse of a minor. In 2007, the Diocese of Fort Worth became the first diocese in Texas to include a list of credibly accused priests on its website. The disclosure of this list is made as part of the Diocese of Fort Worth's ongoing efforts to ensure the safety of our children and its commitment to transparency. This list today contains the names of fifteen priests, one permanent deacon, and one religious brother. You can view the list by visiting the Safe Environment page on our diocesan website (<https://fwdioc.org/safe-environment>). The recent decision by the other Catholic bishops of the state of Texas also to publish the names of clerics who have been credibly accused of sexual misconduct with minors in their respective dioceses and ordinariate is encouraging. I am supportive of this collegial action taken by the members of the Texas Catholic Conference.

As the Bishop of Fort Worth, I maintain a zero-tolerance policy for sexual abuse of minors by clergy because ministry in the Church is a grace from God that carries with it sober responsibility, not a right to be claimed by anyone as an entitlement. Rather, it involves a covenantal trust established through our Baptism as members of the Church founded by Christ. I offer each and every person who is the victim of sexual abuse by clergy of our Diocese, or by any clergy anywhere, my most sincere apology for evil that befell you and my commitment to prevent any such act to be perpetrated against anybody else.

When an allegation of the sexual abuse of a minor is received by the Diocese of Fort Worth, it is immediately reported to the civil authorities (e.g., law enforcement and Child Protective Services). Separate from any investigation by the civil authorities, the Diocese then takes steps to determine whether the alleged incident is *plausible* (i.e., confirm whether the accused and accuser were in fact at the parish/school at the alleged time, etc.). If the allegation is found to be plausible, then the accused is immediately removed from ministry while the Diocese conducts a further investigation in order to determine whether there is reason to believe that the sexual abuse of a minor occurred.

The determination that the Diocese of Fort Worth has reason to believe that the sexual abuse of a minor has occurred is made by me, in consultation with the Diocesan Conduct Review Board. The Conduct Review Board is a confidential consultative body composed mainly of lay members with various backgrounds and areas of expertise well suited to assist me in my assessment of

THE CATHOLIC CENTER



DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



allegations of sexual abuse of minors and in my determination of a cleric's suitability for ministry. This determination is not a finding that the alleged abuse actually occurred. Rather, it is a finding that there is reason to believe that the alleged abuse occurred. The standard that our Diocese uses in making this determination is a lesser standard than that required by our civil or criminal legal systems. As such, the inclusion of an individual on this list is not a final determination under civil or criminal laws that abuse actually occurred. Rather, it is a finding used to remove the accused from ministry in this Diocese permanently, unless the accused is subsequently cleared by the facts.

In 2002, our Diocese created its Office of Safe Environment to take specific action in response to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, known as the Dallas Charter, to address sexual abuse of minors by priests and deacons. Our Diocese extended that commitment for accountability to include all other church personnel, employees and volunteers, including the bishop. Last year, our Diocese trained and processed criminal background checks on 27,498 volunteers, 946 educators, 942 employees, 127 priests, 75 deacons and 42 candidates for ordination. The Diocese of Fort Worth is fully committed to complying with the Dallas Charter and to fulfilling its moral obligation to protect our children.

In the past year we have enhanced an already strong Safe Environment program, to include retraining every two years. Through live, participatory 3-hour *Protecting God's Children*® Awareness Sessions, the Diocese is increasing the focus, vigilance, clarity, engagement, and commitment of all clergy, teachers, employees, volunteers, and parents of Catholic school students.

You can further learn about the ways the Diocese of Fort Worth is helping to protect our children by visiting the Safe Environment page on the diocesan website (<https://fwdioc.org/safe-environment>).

The Diocese of Fort Worth invites anyone who has information about abuse or who has been abused by any priest, deacon, employee, or volunteer of the Church to contact us so that the Church can reach out to you or any victims. Please contact the Office of Victim Assistance at 817-602-5119; the Victim's Assistance Hotline at 817-945-9345; or the Chancellor and Moderator of the Curia, Monsignor E. James Hart, at 817-945-9315. If a crime has been committed, we urge you to immediately contact the local law enforcement officials before contacting the Diocese.

THE CATHOLIC CENTER



DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH
THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



In conclusion, I ask that we unite as the local Church of the Diocese of Fort Worth in prayer and ministry founded in and entrusted to us by Christ with special vigilance for the protection of minors and those who are vulnerable in our families and society. I especially ask your continued prayers for me as your bishop entrusted with the pastoral ministry of care for the People of God in our diocese and in communion with the Vicar of Christ. Most especially, let us pray for the healing of all people harmed through acts of sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy or anyone in authority. With confidence in the freedom of the Truth of the Gospel and in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, I remain,

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

+ Michael F. Olson

Most Reverend Michael F. Olson, STD, MA
Bishop of Fort Worth

THE CATHOLIC CENTER