



DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG

Office of the Bishop

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October 4, 2018

Letter Regarding the Florida Attorney General's Investigation of Institutional Sex Abuse

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Today, as a result of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report, the Florida Attorney General announced an investigation into how the Catholic dioceses of Florida have handled allegations of sexual abuse of minors in the past.

I welcome this investigation and want to assure the public that the Diocese of St. Petersburg has been and continues to be proactive in its efforts to keep children safe, which should be a priority for everyone. We seek to ensure the safety of all children and to ensure that all perpetrators of abuse are removed from ministry.

We denounce all forms of sexual abuse by any person or any institution as a reprehensible crime and believe that perpetrators should be punished to the fullest extent of the law.

Here are helpful facts about actions we are taking to keep children safe:

- **I have met with the Statewide Prosecutor to pledge our cooperation.** I explained the Diocese of St. Petersburg's policies that have been in place since 1996 for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults and strengthened in 2002 upon the adoption of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*.
- **We have established policies that include a zero tolerance for sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults;** mandatory national fingerprint background screening; a lay Review Board to assess all reported allegations against clergy; and mandatory safe environment training for everyone who works or volunteers with minors and vulnerable adults.
- **Many preventive measures have been put in place to protect youth and vulnerable adults.** Since 1992, the Diocese of St. Petersburg has completed fingerprint background screenings on 59,000 priests, deacons, lay employees and volunteers entrusted with the care, responsibility and/or supervision of minors or vulnerable adults, as well as contractor and vendors working in close proximity to these persons

- **We consistently pray for all victims of all abuse.**
- **We consistently urge anyone who has been abused or is aware of abuse to call law enforcement** and the Florida Department of Children and Families Abuse Hotline at 1-800-962-2873. We also urge anyone abused by Church personnel (clergy, a church employee or volunteer) or a contractor/vendor, to call the Diocese of St. Petersburg's Victim Assistance Minister, John Lambert, LCSW. He can be reached by phone at 1-866-407-4505 or by email at jl@dosp.org. He is available to coordinate pastoral care and offer assistance.
- **We are transparent.** The names of our diocesan clergy 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: <https://www.dosp.org/safe-environment/credibly-accused-individuals>. We also created the following webpage for parishioners with Frequently Asked Questions in September of 2018: www.dosp.org/accountability.

As we continue to work through this difficult and painful period in our Church's history, be assured of my continued prayers. Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read "Gregory L. Parkes", with a small cross symbol to the left.

Most Reverend Gregory L. Parkes
Bishop of St. Petersburg