



Communications &
Publications

Diocese of Rockford

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Communications Policy: Media relations regarding sexual abuse allegations

In dealing with media inquiries regarding allegations of sexual abuse by priests, deacons, religious or lay employees of the diocese, the activities of this office are guided by the provisions of Article 7 in the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* (revised edition, 2011), which stipulates: “Dioceses/eparchies Are to be open and transparent in communicating with the public about sexual abuse of minors by clergy within the confines of respect for the privacy and reputation of the individuals involved. This is especially so with regard to informing parish and other church communities directly affected by sexual abuse of a minor.”

Consistent with the provisions cited above, this office’s activities are guided by the following primary values:

- the alleged victim’s welfare, and the protection of children and young people;
- the Church’s pastoral responsibility in the world and to its members, staff and volunteers;
- the rights of the accused; and
- the Church’s credibility with the commercial media and their various audiences.

With these values in mind, the Office of Communication acts as proactively as possible to report substantiated allegations and active investigations of its clergy, employees and/or volunteers to the public and to its stakeholders (whether they be parishioners, parents, students, faculty, volunteers, etc.) in a timely manner whenever necessary through press releases, statements read at Masses and published in bulletins, through email notifications and postings on its official web site, social media and newspaper pages. The Office of Communication and Publications, in collaboration with the Office for Safe Environments and the Diocese's Legal Counsel, insures the regular maintenance and updating of the List of Clergy Against Whom Substantiated Allegations of Sexual Abuse of a Minor Have Been Reported as necessary. In addition, the Office of Communication responds to all media inquiries as soon as possible, recognizing certain limitations may apply in matters in litigation, matters currently being investigated by law enforcement, unsubstantiated allegations, and when a victim-survivor’s privacy is at risk.

All policies for reporting sexual abuse are written and communicated in multiple formats, including print and electronic. Policies and policy updates are distributed to all parishes, schools and other diocesan institutions, and posted on the diocesan website. The Diocese’s sexual abuse hotline number, 815-293-7540, is published weekly in the Diocese’s newspaper, *The Observer* and monthly in the Diocese's Spanish language publication, *El Observador*. This number is also readily available to the public on the Diocesan website and through the Diocese’s Office for Safe Environments and its website.

Too often cases of child abuse prompt sensational attention in the media, which can be harmful to victims, local church communities and the mission of the Church. On the other hand, manifold benefits accrue from a forthright and honest presentation of the diocese’s concerted efforts to

provide a safe environment for youth and to respond quickly and definitively to allegations of child abuse within the Church.

The director of this office serves as official public spokesperson for the diocese and its personnel, including the Diocesan Review Board. When appropriate, this office also assists these people in responding to inquiries from the media. Thus, all media inquiries addressed to the personnel of the diocese (including at the local level) are to be referred immediately to the Director of Communications & Publications, who is to consult with the members of the Review Board and others whose responsibilities come to bear on the specific allegations.

In instances where media inquiries focus on arcane matters of the law, the Director of Communications & Publications may refer media representatives directly to the diocese's legal counsel to assure full and accurate responses on the part of the diocese.

All responses and statements to the media will be guided by the hierarchy of values identified at the outset of this policy for the continued protection of all its Catholic people, especially the young and vulnerable among them.

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