

## **Guide for Reporting Sexual Abuse**

Our Society takes all reports of sexual abuse seriously, and we pledge to respond in a compassionate and pastoral manner. Sexual abuse has devastating consequences, and we have a commitment to help those who have been affected. Sexual misconduct is never acceptable in a pastoral relationship, and it is the responsibility of our priests and brothers to always maintain appropriate emotional and sexual boundaries with those with whom they serve and work.

The following is intended to guide you through the process of making a report and to inform you about what to expect to occur.

### **How does one report an incident of sexual abuse against a member of the Society of the Divine Savior (Salvatorian)?**

If you wish to make a complaint about sexual abuse, either current or past, you have three options about whom to contact:

- 1) You may directly call the Provincial, Fr. Dave Bergner, at 414-258-1735 or write to:  
1735 N. Hi Mount Blvd Milwaukee WI 53208
- 2) You may contact the Victim Assistance Coordinator of the diocese in which you live, for assistance and support in making the complaint.
- 3) You may contact the District Attorney in the jurisdiction where the abuse occurred.

No matter whom you contact, you may expect confidentiality and sensitivity in how your case is handled.

### **What will happen next?**

Two things will occur. The Provincial will offer you compassionate care, such as an offer to obtain counseling to help restore your wholeness, at the Society's expense. A formal investigation of your complaint will also start.

Also, very importantly, when a member currently in active ministry is accused, the member is immediately removed from active ministry pending an investigation.

### **What happens in an investigation?**

What must occur first is a review by civil authorities to determine if a crime can be prosecuted. If civil authorities take the case, the Society will cooperate with law enforcement officials and will continue to pay for your therapy.

When an incident of sexual abuse occurred a long time ago, often the civil authorities determine that any crime is outside the statute of limitations and can no longer be prosecuted. In this case an independent investigation must occur. An investigator familiar with criminal investigations will separately interview several people – the person making the report, the member accused of abuse, and any other persons still available who might have known something about these events. It is possible

that your family, friends, or therapist may have information to contribute. Your therapy at the Society's expense may continue.

### **What if the member is deceased, or is no longer a member of the Society?**

It is obviously more difficult if an investigator cannot talk to the accused person. All files will be available to the investigator, however, about whether other similar complaints have been made about this person in the past.

### **What is done with the investigator's information?**

The investigator compiles all of the information obtained by talking to people into a report. This report is presented to the Milwaukee Area Review Board. This body of diverse professionals is responsible for determining whether sexual abuse probably occurred, based on the evidence presented, or whether there is not enough evidence to support this conclusion. Although this system is imperfect at establishing the truth with certainty, it is the best that can be done for events that occurred long ago.

### **What happens with a finding that sexual abuse occurred?**

The Provincial will notify you of the finding, and will continue to talk with you about ways to extend compassionate care and restore your wholeness.

If the member was removed from active ministry, this restriction will be made permanent. Proper persons will be notified, and this person will never be allowed to serve in active ministry again. The person will be placed on a supervised safety plan to ensure lack of access to minors to abuse again.

Perhaps the member has already been removed from active ministry and placed on safety plan, in which case you will be informed of what precautions are in place. In some instances the member may have been dismissed from the Society, or served time in prison, which is information to which you are entitled.

### **What happens if sexual abuse cannot be substantiated by the Review Board?**

The Provincial will notify you of the finding, and will continue to talk with you about ways to extend compassionate care and restore your wholeness.

Someone who was removed from active ministry while an investigation occurred will be allowed to return to their regular activities. Previous complaints are held on file in the event of a future complaint.

### **Is there outside accountability for this process?**

The U.S. Catholic Council of Bishops has pledged accountability and continuous improvement in this process. An outside accreditation body, Praesidium, regularly audits the Society of the Divine Savior to ensure that processes are followed correctly and with integrity. Every diocese now has a Victim

Assistance Coordinator, to whom you may turn if you would like assistance in interacting with the Society of the Divine Savior.

Prevention of sexual abuse is now a major focus for us. Members must regularly participate in continuing education programs about issues of sexuality and personal conduct. Extensive psychological evaluation is mandatory for seminarians and novices before they enter formation.

**Why should I come forward?**

To heal after being victimized, and to prevent it from happening to someone else.