

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT COMMUNICATION PROCEDURE OF THE DIOCESE OF NEW ULM

The Diocese of New Ulm's communication procedure reflects our commitment to transparency, openness, and willingness to share information regarding issues of sexual misconduct on the part of clergy and church personnel. This policy also respects the privacy and confidentiality of persons involved in any allegation. Matters under litigation, allegations that are unsubstantiated, and information which a victim has asked the Diocese to keep private, will be considered as exemptions to "transparency."

Upon the public disclosure of a credible allegation against a member of the diocesan clergy or personnel, the diocesan Office of Communications will issue a statement or news release to the media outlets that serve the Diocese. This statement or news release will also be posted on the Diocesan website (www.dnu.org). Written notification will be sent to the location where the alleged perpetrator served, and a meeting will be scheduled in the community where the alleged offense was committed to offer individuals the opportunity to respond, to ask questions, and to give any other victim the opportunity to come forward. Any member of the clergy found guilty of an accusation will be relieved of all responsibilities to the Diocese/parish and placed on administrative leave. Any non-clergy personnel of the Diocese found guilty of an incident of sexual misconduct shall be immediately terminated from employment and any position of responsibility with the Diocese. If there is a countersuit, the Diocese will release information on its position in this matter.

The diocesan website will post the current *Sexual Misconduct Policy*, articles published in the Diocesan newspaper, *The Prairie Catholic*, such as the *Guidelines for Implementation of "Safe Environment" Programs*, and other current documents and articles relating to sexual misconduct released by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*; *Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons*; *Restoring Trust: A Response to Sexual Abuse*, and *Responding to Complaints of Sexual Misconduct in the Church*.

In dealing with sensitive information, church communicators must constantly ask, "How can this story be presented so that it will work toward building rather than tearing down the community?" "How will the Church work with community news outlets to seek justice and healing?" The *Sexual Misconduct Policy* commits the Communications Office to several key areas of responsibility where the news media can be of help in this process:

1. *We are committed to accountability.*

Public leadership is a public trust. Leaders must be held accountable for that trust. When this trust is violated or questioned, it must be dealt with openly and forthrightly addressed.

2. *We are committed to truth and accuracy.*

When misconduct or other controversy involving public figures occurs, rumors quickly run rampant. It is the role of church communicators to provide accurate information for the public record and to dispel any rumors. We must always be a reliable source of information.

The publication of accurate information demonstrates our commitment to seriously respond to allegations.

3. *We are committed to respond to victims.*

The *Sexual Misconduct Policy* emphasizes our responsibility to offer immediate assistance, compassion and support to those who feel injured by sexual misconduct.

4. *We are committed to deterrence.*

Through communication and public education the Church has the opportunity and obligation to raise awareness about sexual misconduct. At least twice a year the Diocese will publish an announcement in the Diocesan newspaper, *The Prairie Catholic*, to inform people how they can raise concerns about sexual misconduct. Printed materials on this topic will be available upon request from all parishes and diocesan institutions. Through this consciousness-raising, we may deter persons from inappropriate behaviors and assist others who have been abused and are afraid to seek healing. Publication of resources can be a great service to individuals.

The Bishop of the Diocese of New Ulm will address pressing issues of sexual misconduct through articles published in the diocesan newspaper, *The Prairie Catholic*, and by way of a press conference. He is also willing to address the individuals directly regarding sexual misconduct cases that may occur. Messages directly from the Bishop will also be posted on the Diocesan website as well as pertinent segments of streaming video.

The Bishop's Delegate in Matters Pertaining to Sexual Misconduct is the spokesperson for the Bishop and the Diocese.

Any media contact or inquiries regarding an incident of sexual misconduct should be directed to the Diocesan Director of Communications at 507-359-2966.