



## DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA

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*Communications Department*

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Diocese of Venice has been Cooperating with Statewide Review**

Today Attorney General Pam Bondi held a news conference to announce a statewide investigation into all seven Catholic Dioceses in Florida regarding past child sex abuse cases.

The Diocese of Venice in Florida has met with the statewide prosecutor, Mr. Nick Cox, and welcomes the opportunity to cooperate with his investigation pertaining to the protection of young people. Many such inquiries are occurring in other states due to the publication of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report. The processes, procedures and individual files pertaining to any allegation of sexual abuse with a minor by someone serving in ministry are part of this review, as with the six other Dioceses in Florida.

Protecting children and vulnerable adults is a priority that all must share. The Diocese has already taken steps to be proactive in protecting children. Since 1995, the Diocese of Venice implemented a formal policy on the protection of children in all areas of ministry.

The Diocesan Safe Environment Program provides education and training for all employees (priests, religious, deacons, laity) and volunteers who work with minors and vulnerable adults. Two major components of the program are background screenings and trainings in safe environment. A professional company has been hired by the Diocese to conduct Level 2 background screenings through the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). All employees and any persons serving in ministry having contact with minors, are required to be re-screened every 5 years.

Policies for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults and the Code of Pastoral Conduct are published on our Diocesan website. The requirements for the protection of all minors and vulnerable adults are also published in all parishes, schools and Diocesan entities. Clergy who are found to have been credibly accused of sexual misconduct with a minor are to be immediately removed from ministry.

Since 2003 the Diocese has been audited on its compliance with its policy and pledges cooperation with the statewide prosecutor for this inquiry. In addition, out of respect for



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the statewide prosecutor's stated practice of not commenting on investigations, the Diocese does not foresee making any further statement pertaining to this review.

While this statewide inquiry is not based on any new allegations, upon the conclusion of this review it is hoped that all institutions (public schools, nursing homes, universities, etc.) who have access directly, or indirectly with children and vulnerable adults, will review and evaluate safe environment policies and procedures to ensure the safety of all.

It is the duty of all persons to report abuse. An allegation of sexual abuse of a minor by anyone should be reported immediately to the Florida Department of Children and Families Child Abuse Hotline (800-96Abuse) and/or any Law enforcement agency. If the alleged abuser is a Diocesan employee or volunteer also notify the Victim Assistance Coordinator at 941-416-6114.

As a Church we continue to unite our prayers for all victims of abuse.