

What is the 'Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People'?

Q. What is the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People"?

A. The Charter is a comprehensive set of procedures established by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in June 2002 for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. The Charter includes guidelines for reconciliation, healing, accountability and prevention of further acts of abuse. It directs action in all the following matters:

- * Creating a safe environment for children and young people;
- * Healing and reconciliation of victims and survivors;
- * Making prompt and effective responses to allegations;
- * Cooperating with civil authorities;
- * Disciplining offenders; and
- * Providing for means of accountability for the future to ensure the problem continues to be effectively dealt with through the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection and the National Review Board.

Q. Where can I read it?

A. The Charter is available for download from the USCCB Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection website.

Q. How does the Charter define a "minor"?

A. In both civil and canon law, a minor is anyone under the age of 18. Until 1994, under canon law, a minor was considered any person under the age of 16. In 1994, canon law was changed for dioceses of the USCCB so that anyone under the age of 18 was considered to be a minor. In 2001, it changed for the universal Church. Also covered under the Charter is anyone over the age of 18 who habitually lacks the use of reason and therefore is considered equivalent to a minor.

Q. What if the abuse occurred prior to the enactment of the Charter?

A. Any act of sexual abuse of a minor which occurred prior to the Charter being implemented but is brought forward now will be considered relevant and subject to the Charter. The Charter pertains to acts of abuse in the past, present and future.

Q. How is compliance with the Charter monitored?

A. In June 2003, the Office (now Secretariat) of Child and Youth Protection began an audit process of all dioceses throughout the United States. The audit is used to determine if the diocese is implementing the practices required by the Charter. An "Annual Report on the Implementation of the Charter" is prepared by the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection.

Source: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops