



February 17, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write today to share some important updates concerning our Safe Environment policies and procedures.

Dioceses around the country are audited each year to determine adherence to the USCCB's *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. An on-site audit occurs every three years. An audit team comes to the diocese, interviews individuals involved with safe environment administration, checks records and processes, and visits parishes. Between on-site audits, data audits are conducted. During a data audit, the diocese sends required information to auditors for review.

A 2021 on-site audit of Diocese of Crookston Safe Environment practices was conducted by Stonebridge Business Partners of Rochester, New York. The firm found that the Diocese of Crookston was compliant for the audit period of July 2018 to June 2021. As is normal course, an accompanying management letter suggested some changes and updates to diocesan policy, procedures, and our *Code of Conduct for Church Leaders*.

The Stonebridge audit suggests:

- All allegations received in the intake process should not only be reported to the bishop's delegate (to date, that person has been the Vicar General), but at the same time the Ministerial Review Board (MRB) chairperson. Adding a report to the MRB chair creates additional "checks and balances" when an allegation moves through process.
- Current policies make clearer that the diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator can attend meetings of the MRB, especially when it is prudent for the individual to have a voice in the meetings.
- Policy and Code of Conduct updates to reflect 2011 *Charter* revisions prohibiting the acquisition, possession, and distribution of child pornography. This means defining sexual abuse of a minor clearer in Diocese of Crookston safe environment policy documents as well as the *Code of Conduct for Church Leaders*. Such definitions should be inclusive of the child pornography prohibition.

Bishop Pates, while serving as Apostolic Administrator, worked with the MRB and Janelle Gergen on preparing policy revisions prior to my appointment as bishop. I reviewed them and with the recommendation of the MRB, will have them adopted and republished on our website this month.

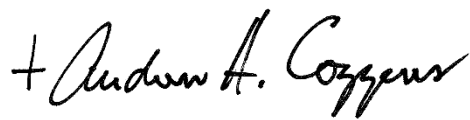
Through prayer and discernment, and discussions with the Diocesan Finance Council and MRB, I have decided to establish a part-time “Bishop’s Delegate” position within our Office of Safe Environment. The delegate will manage diocesan processes for handling allegations of misconduct ensuring full compliance with the law, our Safe Environment policies and procedures, and the USCCB *Charter*. The delegate will facilitate the work of the MRB and collaborate with Office of Safe Environment staff concerning programming, certifications, and audits. This separates the Vicar General from the oversight of allegations as they move through process and disclosure.

A complete position listing for the delegate and information about applying are posted at crookston.org/employment. Candidates with proven experience in health care, mental health treatment, law, victimization, law enforcement, jurisprudence, human resources, business management, or other relevant fields are sought. Interested parties should email a cover letter and resume to Janelle Gergen (jgergen@crookston.org) by March 31. All inquiries will remain confidential.

I am grateful for all the work at so many levels of the Church that goes in to creating and maintaining safe environments in the Diocese of Crookston. We know how important this work is as part of our Gospel witness and our desire to bring healing to the Church and the world. Each one of us has a role to play in the prevention of, recognition of and the reporting of abuse, especially sexual abuse of young people and other vulnerable individuals. We can never become complacent in this work, always evaluating areas that can be strengthened. As bishop of Crookston, please know of my firm commitment to these efforts.

Let us continue to pray for the healing of all victims of sexual abuse, especially those who have been hurt by the Church.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Andrew H. Cozzens". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

The Most Rev. Andrew H. Cozzens, S.T.D., D.D.
Bishop of Crookston