

# A Report from the Ombudsman to the People of the Diocese

Report of Activity for July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012

August 2012

## Dear Members of the Diocese,

Just last year, Bishop Robert Finn made a series of promises to the people of our diocese. In his Five-Point Plan, he pledged to appoint an ombudsman and public liaison to field and independently investigate reports of abuse, suspicious or inappropriate behavior (boundary violations), or sexual misconduct. His call for independence resonated with me. I immediately asked to be considered for this role.



As a mother of young children, my heart was invested in a just outcome for those among us who come forward to report abuse. As a lifelong Catholic, I believe that everyone shares in the responsibility to protect children and vulnerable adults. As a former team leader with the Jackson County Prosecutor's Office, I wanted to offer my experience in investigating and prosecuting thousands of cases of physical and emotional abuse.

After meeting with Bishop Finn and asking and answering questions, I accepted the offer to become your ombudsman. I was assured that I had the authority and responsibility to consult with law enforcement or social services at any point in an investigation. My appointment gave me a responsibility to investigate your concerns – about a priest, an employee, or volunteer – whether it occurred yesterday or decades ago. I promised to honor the trust you have placed in me by being open and honest about my work.

This report documents how I am keeping this promise.



Jenifer Valenti

## REPORTING ABUSE

1. If the victim is a minor, call Missouri's Child Abuse Hotline at 800.392.3738.
2. Call the police or 911.
3. If the abuser is an employee, volunteer or clergyman in the diocese, call the Ombudsman at 816.812.2500.

## A Day in the Life of the Ombudsman

In addition to fielding and investigating reports of sexual abuse, inappropriate behavior or sexual misconduct by clergy, employees or volunteers, the Ombudsman advises the Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection (OCYP) on initiatives that keep children safe in Catholic schools and parish and diocesan programs. Over the past year, the Ombudsman has:

- Contributed to the development of the soon-to-be-released *Policy on Ethics and Integrity in Ministry*
- Helped to organize a comprehensive compliance policy governing safe environment practices
- Identified topics for professional development, such as mandatory reporting requirements and training
- Evaluated background screening practices and providers to ensure that a strong safety net is in place
- Consulted on the expansion of outreach to victims and supportive services

To help protect children, youth and vulnerable adults, check out the Diocese website at [http://www.diocese-kcsj.org/content/protecting\\_children/](http://www.diocese-kcsj.org/content/protecting_children/) where you can find more information about the work of OCYP.

## Office of Child and Youth Protection

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(Partnering with the Office of Child and Youth Protection)

The Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection was established in December 2011, and plans to issue an annual report that will include a summary of investigations conducted by the Ombudsman, Victims Services and Training and Education.

## Types of Allegations

Allegations fall into a number of categories. While every report merits serious attention, those in which victims are minors – persons under the age of 18 – or vulnerable adults require specific actions mandated by law.

When the Ombudsman receives a report, the first step is to determine if there is a reasonable suspicion of abuse or other criminal behavior. All reports of sexual abuse that include specific information about the accused and relevant facts about the events are also referred to the police. If the victim is a minor, a report is immediately made to the Children’s Division.

As a second step, the Ombudsman confirms the status and whereabouts of the accused. Is the accused living or deceased, employed or retired, currently in active ministry or service? At the conclusion of the investigation, the Ombudsman presents information to the Independent Review Board for consideration and recommendation.

**Sexual Abuse** is a general term for a range of sexual conduct or interactions with a minor or vulnerable adult. The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People defines abuse as an external, objectively grave violation of the Sixth Commandment which does not necessarily involve force or physical contact. Child abuse also includes the possession, production or distribution of child pornography. A substantiated report of sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult permanently disqualifies a person from all ministry, employment or voluntary service in parish, school or diocesan programs.

**Sexual Abuse Reports: 20 (17 Persons Named)**

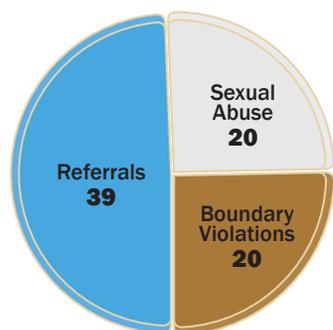
- Substantiated: 7 (Five Persons Named)  
*All removed from Public Ministry, Employment or Volunteer Service; Three Deceased*
- Cleared and Returned to Service: 2
- Inconclusive: 8 (Seven Persons Named)  
*Four Previously Removed from Public Ministry, Employment or Volunteer Service; Unable to Locate or Identify Three*
- Investigations Pending: 2 (Two Persons Named)  
*Both Suspended from Public Ministry, Employment or Volunteer Service*
- Referred to Religious Order: 1\* *Suspended from Public Ministry*

**Boundary Violations** are warning signs of the potential for abuse. Oftentimes, an adult will violate boundaries by sitting too close to a child, seeking time alone with a particular child, or giving gifts or special favors. Adults who interact with children and youth must respect boundaries and report others who do not. Boundary violations cover a broad range of behaviors – some result from a lack of understanding or sensitivity and others may be so serious that they could point to an immediate or future threat to children.

**Boundary Violations: 20 (20 Persons Named)**

- Removed from Public Ministry, Employment or Volunteer Service: 4
- Cleared: 9
- Educated and Returned with Supervision to Public Ministry, Employment or Volunteer Service: 5
- Investigations Pending: 1
- Referred to Religious Order: 1\* *Suspended from Public Ministry*

**Total Reports Received: 79**



### How Reports Were Addressed

The Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph includes 27 counties in northern and western Missouri. Within this region, more than 133,000 people are members of the 98 parishes and participate in ministries and services ranging from Catholic school education to adult faith formation. In this reporting period, there were a total of 79 reports alleging sexual abuse of a minor, boundary violations and/or referrals.

**Total Persons Named: 72**

Clergy	20
Employee	17
Unknown/Other	12
Family Member	11
Volunteer	7
Religious Order	5

**Referrals** are outside the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman and, yet, require action. By way of example, if school personnel suspect that a child is being abused in the home, the information must be referred to the Missouri Abuse Hotline and will be referred to the police. In this reporting period, there were 39 referrals made by the Ombudsman to civil authorities, administrative staff, and caseworkers.

**Misconduct** The Ombudsman also fields reports of clergy misconduct or immoral behavior. Reports of misconduct do not involve minors or vulnerable adults or criminal behavior. Misconduct reports are managed by the Bishop and are not included in the data contained in this report.

\* In addition to notifying law enforcement, and the Children’s Division when appropriate, the Ombudsman refers all reports of abuse to the accused’s religious community, and notifies the Bishop. If the accused ministered in the diocese, the Independent Review Board also receives the report.