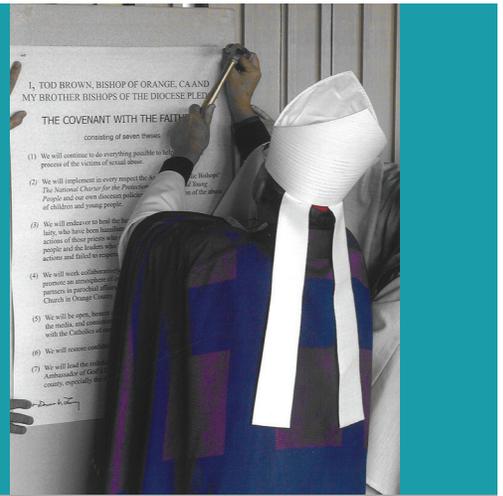


# KEEPING THE COMMITMENT

With the release of the film *'Spotlight,'* a look back at the Diocese of Orange's comprehensive—and continuing—response to the Church's sexual abuse crisis



## By OC Catholic Staff

In early 2002, the *Boston Globe* began publication of a series of stories about clergy sexual abuse of children in the Archdiocese of Boston. The investigation by the paper was exhaustive and resulted in a 2003 Pulitzer Prize for the paper and its *"Spotlight"* investigative team of reporters.

The story of the investigation forms the basis of the soon-to-be-released film titled "Spotlight," to be shown in limited release in U.S. theaters beginning Nov. 6 and set for general release beginning Nov. 20. The drama from Open Roads Films is directed and co-written by Tom McCarthy and features several notable actors and actresses: Michael Keaton, Rachel McAdams, Liev Schreiber, Mark Ruffalo, Stanley Tucci and John Slattery. It debuted at the Venice Film Festival in September and has since received many positive advance reviews.

For many Catholics and others, the film will serve as a reminder of the continuing absolute need within the Church for uncompromising vigilance, accountability and, most of all, care of and solidarity with the victims of abuse and their families. The subject is sobering and the memories of those days of crisis within the Church remain disturbing and strong.

More than a decade has passed since the sexual abuse crisis was revealed as a systemic failure within the fabric of the Church. During that time, the Church — at the local, national and international level — has made unprecedented strides in its efforts to eradicate the problem and to care for and make restitution to the victims of abuse.

At the local level, the Diocese of Orange emerged early on with one of the most imaginative, effective, wide-ranging, transparent and committed series of measures to address the multifaceted issue. With the release of "Spotlight," the diocese once again recognizes the opportunity to raise awareness of child sexual abuse and to reiterate its commitment to never allowing such a situation to occur again, remembering that life is precious and is to be protected at all levels.

In June of 2002 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) instituted the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, a blueprint for dealing with the sexual abuse crisis in the Church, and pledged to promote healing and reconciliation with victim survivors of sexual abuse, guarantee an effective response to allegations of sexual abuse of minors, ensure the accountability of their procedures, and protect the faithful in the future. The Diocese of Orange responded to the charter's publication immediately, and an unaffiliated auditing firm charged with verifying diocesan compliance with the charter's mandates has found the Diocese of Orange to be in full compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People every year since its inception in 2003.

More broadly, the diocese has publicly acknowledged past failings and has apologized personally to the victims of abuse and their families and has made clear its commitment to the fair resolution of every legitimate abuse claim. The bold initiative to settle the 2003 clergy abuse cases in a respectful and humble manner and to institute strict procedures for the protection of children and young people has been seen as a model for others. The diocese also took the unprecedented step of releasing all appropriate personnel files related to this settlement in May of 2005.

In 2002 the diocese implemented a comprehensive approach to ensuring that children and teens are as safe as possible, employing a comprehensive background screening for all adults likely to be in contact with children—already more than 75,000 have been vetted. This process allows for the collection of a wide variety of past screening data, including extensive backgrounds checks and fingerprinting, and is designed to enhance already in place diocesan policies.

Since 2002 all clergy, employees, and volunteers have been required to undergo Safe Environment Training. In 2014 alone, the diocese trained 286 priests, 115 deacons, 1,664 teachers and more than 25,500 school employees and volunteers. Diocesan schools and religious education classes at parishes and diocesan centers also provide Safe Environment education for children. This procedure is suited to their age and level of understanding. In 2014, nearly 44,000 children participated in this critically important awareness program.

In addition to these important background screening and training requirements, the diocese has introduced the following procedures:

- The diocese cooperates with law enforcement and appropriate agencies in the re-ported of incidents of childhood sexual abuse.
- It has convened an independent oversight board to investigate any and all claims of abuse.
- Pamphlets outlining our policies are available in the vestibules of our churches and in the offices of diocesan schools and religious education programs.
- Every member of the clergy and every employee has read and signed the diocesan policy on sexual misconduct.
- Seminaries are doing a better job of both psychological screening and educating the men applying for admission to the priesthood.
- Background checks are conducted for all seminarians, priests and religious.
- All diocesan elementary schools and religious education programs have added Kids and Company, a safety education program, to their curriculum. This provides age-appropriate education for children and information for teachers and parents.
- Diocesan high schools all have developed a safety education curriculum.
- The diocese offers *Respecting the Boundaries, Keeping Ministerial Relationships Healthy and Holy* workshops for new employees twice a year.
- For more than 10 years the diocese has had a reporting line for anyone who has a concern about acts of childhood sexual abuse.

Bishop Kevin Vann and the diocese remain committed to ensuring the events of the past are never repeated and remain vigilant in protecting our children and young people.

