

The role of Independent Review Board

In a letter to Catholics in the Diocese of Green Bay dated Aug. 16, Bishop David Ricken referred to an Independent Review Board (IRB). Some have asked, "What is the IRB and what does it do?"

In 2002, the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) met in Dallas, Texas, and as a result of that meeting they created a document called the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People." It set forth the commitment of the Catholic Church to eradicate the scourge of sexual abuse. The Charter created a lay board called the IRB.



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That same year, I received a call from Bishop Robert Banks and was asked if I would serve on the IRB board. I have chaired the board since that time. Every diocese in the country has an IRB to advise the diocesan bishop on sexual abuse matters. Bishop David Ricken has expanded the role of the Diocese of Green Bay's IRB to include not only priest and deacon issues, but to advise him concerning policies, practices, school and teacher issues, parish employees and boundary violations.

We work toward consensus on recommendations that are given to the bishop. This means that we discuss an issue until we reach an agreement. This has been our method of operation since the beginning. It has always

been the recommendation of the IRB to report all allegations to civil authorities. The IRB meets quarterly and provides lay advice to Bishop Ricken on the issues related to protecting children. In some cases, victims do not want their names to be made public and want only a meeting with the bishop. These cases are also investigated. However, the identity of the victim is protected. The IRB receives periodic reports on the status of each case as it moves forward through the process.

Members of the IRB come from different educational backgrounds and bring different skills and experiences to the board. The members have included a priest, a child protection expert, a psychologist, a college president, attorneys, teachers, business employees and others. The board has been independent. The board has never changed any recommendation that it made to the bishop and all three bishops (Bishops Banks, David Zubik and Ricken) followed each recommendation concerning every case that was brought before the IRB.

Due to the structure of the board, the individual members do not give press conferences or speak about board deliberations on an individual basis because the board acts collectively. The IRB is an example of the laity being directly involved in the church to address this crisis and to protect God's children. Much has been accomplished and more needs to be done.

Healy is an attorney with a local law firm and currently serves as chair of the Independent Review Board. He also is currently serving on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' National Review Board.

Role of Victim Assistance Coordinator: Accompanying survivors of abuse

As Victim Assistance Coordinator for the Diocese of Green Bay, I am brought in early in the process when an allegation of abuse of a minor is first received. I oversee the



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initial review of the allegation against members of the clergy, but I also accompany the survivors of this abuse on their own personal journey toward healing.

Often this involves facilitating counseling for the survivor here at Catholic Charities or through outside agencies. Most importantly, I serve as an advocate to listen and provide support to survivors who only may now be disclosing trauma they suffered from events that occurred decades earlier.

I also facilitate the annual healing services offered by Bishop David Ricken during the month of April. These services are meant to bring

spiritual healing to those impacted by abuse.

In addition, I am responsible for coordinating the Independent Review Board (IRB) established in the diocese in 2002. The IRB consists primarily of lay professionals in the fields of law, mental health and child protection who perform the following:

1. Review and make recommendations to the bishop concerning changes to existing policies or the adoption of new sexual misconduct policies.
2. Review and make recommendations to the bishop regarding the continuation in ministry of clergy who have allegedly sexually abused or exploited minors.
3. Review and make recommendations to the bishop regarding the return to ministry of priests and deacons following their removal from active ministry when allegations are later found to be unsubstantiated.

Flannery is a former law enforcement professional who has extensive experience dealing with sexual assault cases.
