

Information Paper: Diocesan Review Board  
Diocese of Richmond

1. Purpose: Action item #9 in the Our Lady of Peace action plan to prevent and eliminate child sexual abuse calls for our parish to be better informed on the purpose and composition of the Richmond Diocesan Review Board. The purpose of this information paper is to provide details on the DRB.
2. Background: The Call-To-Action-Committee developed an action plan for OLP to help prevent and eliminate the sexual abuse of children, young people, and the most vulnerable persons in the Catholic Church. Action item #9 states, “We will seek to be better informed on the Diocesan Review Board, its purpose and composition”. In 2002, the US Council of Catholic Bishops approved the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, also known as “The Dallas Charter”. Article 2 of that charter required each diocese or eparchy (the Eastern Church) to establish a review board to assist the bishop in the determination of disposition of allegations of sexual abuse by priests, deacons, religious, and lay persons.
3. Discussion:
  - a. The Diocesan Review Board is an advisory committee that is appointed by the bishop. Each member is appointed for a term of 3 years, however individual member terms can be renewed. The Review Board is composed of individuals recognized for their integrity, good judgement and full communion with the Church. The majority of the regular members of the board are lay persons not in the employ of the diocese.
  - b. Current membership of the Richmond DRB includes Board Chair Mr. Ronald W. Vessell, M.Ed, L.P.C. (licensed professional counselor), Very Rev. Timothy M. Kuhneman, E.V. (Episcopal Vicar), Rev. Msgr. Mark Richard Lane, L.P.C., Mr. James B. Thorsen, Esq., Retired Sheriff Michael L. Wade, and Ms. Gracie Taylor, L.C.S.W. (Licensed Clinical Social Worker).
  - c. The DRB functions as a confidential consultative body for the bishop. The purpose of the board is to assist the bishop in cases involving allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy and other church personnel. The DRB helps in gathering facts, reviewing the facts gathered by fact-finding committees, assessing information, evidence, and allegations for credibility and substance based on the facts.
  - d. The DRB reports its findings to the Bishop, with advice and consultation in judging the allegation(s) and making recommendations for appropriate actions. In making decisions on the disposition of allegations the bishop considers the input from the DRB. Once the bishop makes a decision on the allegation of sexual abuse, he will determine what actions to take relative to the accused and the accuser.
  - e. The DRB will track that decision and any related actions to ensure they are implemented on behalf of the bishop. The DRB maintains a record of all their proceedings relative to the case.

4. Summary: In accordance with the “Dallas” Charter, the Diocese of Richmond has established a Diocesan Review Board. The DRB is appointed by the bishop and is his confidential body to assist him in determining the facts associated with allegations of sexual abuse by the clergy, religious and lay people within the church. In my estimation it would be inappropriate to attempt to influence this board in that it is an instrument of the bishop. However, we should continue to learn about the DRB and use the information we gain to inform our action plan and help to eliminate sexual abuse of children and young people within our Church.

5. Recommendations:

- a. Discuss this information paper at the next meeting of CEASA to determine if more information or action is warranted.
- b. Put the paper before the parish council for consideration.
- c. Inform the parish of what we have learned about the DRB and the status of this action. We will post a notice in the OLP bulletin and a copy of this paper on the OLP website.
- d. Monitor the diocesan website for updates on the DRB.

6. Respectfully submitted to the Committee for Education and Action on Sexual Abuse (CEASA) by Scott West on July 8, 2020.