

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Ash Wednesday
February 14, 2018

My Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Today I announce the establishment of an Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program (IRCP) here in the Diocese of Syracuse. The IRCP is designed to offer reparation, promote reconciliation and further healing to those individuals who have been sexually abused by members of our clergy.

The clergy sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church is a horrific chapter in our Church history. It has left an indelible mark on the faith lives of so many. As your bishop, I would like to apologize again for the pain and suffering caused by some priests in the diocese. Over the past 15 years, the Diocese of Syracuse has addressed this problem aggressively by reporting all allegations to the appropriate District Attorney, ensuring that no priest with a credible allegation of abuse remains in ministry, and preventing acts of abuse through our highly successful Safe Environment Program. Survivors have been provided counseling, spiritual direction and other support to help them find ways to move forward. Yet, there is no question we have made missteps in handling this crisis and we continue to look for meaningful ways to reach out to those who have been harmed.

Over the past year, we have monitored the IRCP in the Archdiocese of New York, the Diocese of Brooklyn and the Diocese of Rockville Centre. The response from survivors and their families has been extremely positive. We know and acknowledge that we cannot reverse the damage that was done in the past but our hope is that this new effort will provide an opportunity to seek forgiveness for the irreparable acts of the past and perhaps, bring a sense of healing to some.

The Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program will be spearheaded by Mr. Kenneth Feinberg and Ms. Camille Biros. Mr. Feinberg and Ms. Biros are well known for their experience in mediation and administration of compensation programs for the survivors of the 9/11 tragedy, the BP oil spill and most recently the IRCPs offered in the three downstate dioceses.

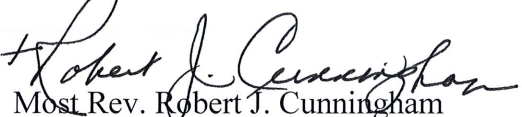
Serving as independent administrators, Mr. Feinberg and Ms. Biros will work with those who have previously notified the diocese that they had been harmed by a member of our clergy. These individuals will be contacted by letter to invite them to participate in this voluntary program. Mr. Feinberg and Ms. Biros retain complete and sole discretion over all eligibility agreements and the settlement compensation amounts for eligible individuals. The diocese will accept their determinations without question. For more information on the program, please visit our website at www.SyracuseDioceseIRCP.com.

The Diocese must bear the cost of this program and will be using funds from its general liability insurance programs. The Diocese is self-insured and over the years has evaluated its insurance coverage as well as built up reserves for both seen and unforeseen events. The Diocese will *not* use money given by the people of the diocese to support parishes, schools, the Annual Hope Appeal, the Foundation of the Roman Catholic Diocese, the Cathedral Restoration Fund, Catholic Charities, or any other charitable fund in the diocese.

It is fitting that I am announcing this program on Ash Wednesday—the beginning of our Lenten journey. The ashes that we receive are a sign of penance, biblical in origin, which express our human condition as affected by sin. In this sign, we outwardly express our guilt before God and we are prompted by hope that the Lord is kind and compassionate, patient and abounding in mercy.

I ask that you please join me in prayer that this new effort will bring reconciliation, forgiveness, hope and healing to all so deeply affected. Pray too that this terrible scourge will be removed not only from the Church but from all society.

Sincerely yours in Christ,


Most Rev. Robert J. Cunningham
Bishop of Syracuse