



# DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

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Office of Communications

Catholic Center • 11625 Old St. Augustine Road • Jacksonville, Florida • 32258  
Phone: (904) 262.3200 • Fax: (904) 262.2398 • [www.dosafl.com](http://www.dosafl.com)

## Statement by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez of the Diocese of St. Augustine

CONTACT: Kathleen Bagg  
(904) 262-1705/office  
Email: [kbagg@dosafl.com](mailto:kbagg@dosafl.com)

### **Bishop Estévez Supports Investigation by Florida's Attorney General**

The Florida Attorney General announced today (Oct. 4, 2018) they will investigate the Diocese of St. Augustine along with the other Florida dioceses to ensure the Church is properly handling allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy and church personnel.

Bishop Felipe Estévez said he is supportive of the investigation and the diocese will cooperate fully throughout the process.

“This has been a very painful period for all Catholics. I hope the outcome of this investigation and other acts of transparency by the dioceses in Florida will bring about greater trust in the Church. Our goals are similar – to ensure the safety of all children and vulnerable adults and to prevent perpetrators of abuse from serving in active ministry,” said Bishop Estévez.

In 1989, the diocese initiated a process for reporting and reviewing suspected abuse by clergy and church personnel. An extensive program of education and criminal background checks by the FDLE and the FBI followed to ensure our children and vulnerable adults are safe. Allegations of sexual abuse are addressed promptly and thoroughly, providing pastoral care to victims and their families. We have a zero-tolerance policy to guarantee that allegations are reported to authorities and that anyone found to have committed abuse will be confronted swiftly and justly.

“I pledge continued efforts to protect those who cannot protect themselves. We must act on behalf of victims of abuse and their families in order to bring them the love, healing, and light of Christ,” Bishop Estévez said.

We call upon the people of our community to contact local law enforcement if you have been abused or you know of abuse. If you are uncomfortable for any reason with the Church providing help, we can connect you with appropriate community services by calling our Victim Assistance Coordinator at (904) 208-6979.

And while the diocese supports a review of our safe environment program, we are pleased to hear that the Attorney General is not limiting this investigation to the Catholic Church, but all organizations and institutions who have access, directly or indirectly, to children and vulnerable adults.

Out of respect for the Attorney General's investigation, the diocese will not comment further on the review of its files until the state has completed its investigation.

To learn more about our safe environment program, visit [www.dosafl.com/protect](http://www.dosafl.com/protect).

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