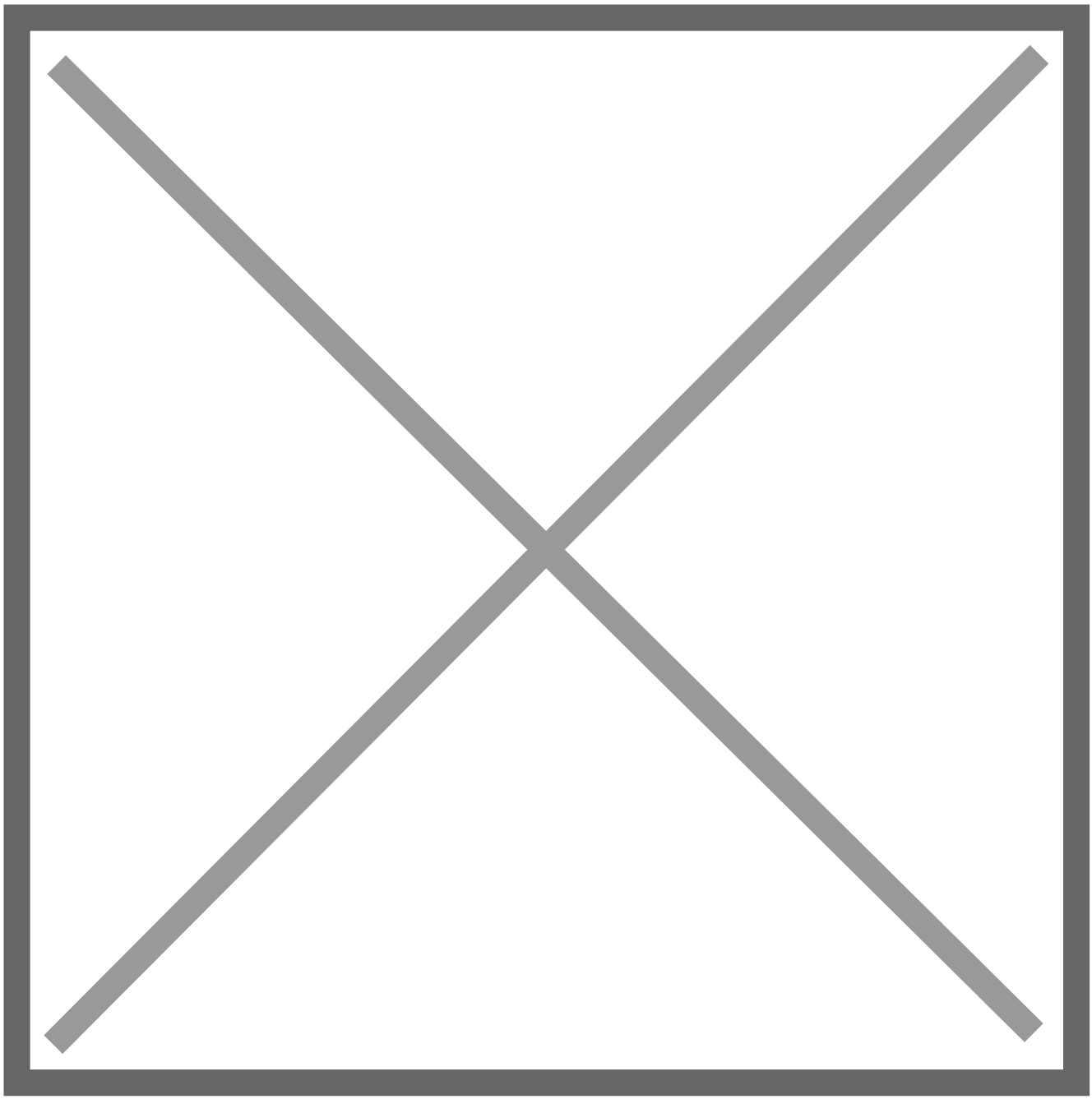
News



This is the 2018 cover of the USCCB "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People." The charter was first approved by the U.S. bishops in June 2002 during their spring assembly in Dallas. (CNS photo/Rick Musacchio, Tennessee Register)



by Catholic News Service

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The 20th anniversary of the U.S. bishops' passage of the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" is "not a time of celebration, but a time of continued vigilance and determination," said the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"In these 20 years, we have greatly benefited from listening to and working with survivors of abuse. We are grateful for their courage in sharing their stories and for helping the church strive to create a culture of protection and healing," Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez said in a June 9 statement.

The witness of survivors "has led directly to meaningful reform in the church and to a greater awareness of sexual abuse in the wider world. For past survivors and future children, it is imperative that we remain vigilant," the archbishop said.

The charter was originally approved by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in June 2002 during their spring assembly in Dallas. It is a comprehensive set of procedures for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy.

It includes guidelines for creating a safe environment for children and young people; healing and reconciliation for abuse survivors; making prompt and effective response to allegations; cooperating with civil authorities; disciplining offenders; and providing for accountability and the prevention of future acts.

The charter, which was revised in 2005, 2011 and 2018, also created the USCCB's Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection.

Since the charter was first approved, the U.S. Catholic Church "has worked hard to fulfill our pledge to support the healing of those hurt by sexual abuse, along with their families," Gomez said.

"We have also strived to be faithful to our promise to protect children and young people," he continued. "Today, millions of children and adults have been trained to spot the signs of abusive behavior, allegations of sexual abuse are reported to local law enforcement, background checks are the norm, review boards comprised of lay experts meet to assess allegations, and victim assistance coordinators are in place to assist survivors in finding help."

At this 20-year mark, "we remain firm with Pope Francis' commitment 'that everything possible must be done to rid the church of the scourge of the sexual abuse of minors and to open pathways of reconciliation and healing for those who were abused,'" Gomez said.

"We entrust our prayers for survivors of abuse, their families, and for those who minister in the church to our Blessed Mother, who offers her loving protection to all her children," he said. "We ask for her intercession as we continue in our work of protecting those close to the heart of her Son, Jesus."

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