News



Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, is pictured in a Nov. 15, 2022, photo. Archbishop Broglio has appointed James Bogner, a retired FBI agent, as the next chair of the National Review Board. (CNS/OSV News, Bob Roller)

Gina Christian

View Author Profile

OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

August 2, 2024
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

A retired FBI agent will head up the U.S. bishops' consultative safe environment body, while a clergy abuse survivor, a nursing professor and two clinical social workers are also among the board's Aug. 1 appointments.

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has appointed James Bogner as the next chair of the National Review Board. A former high-level FBI special agent with more than 35 years of law enforcement experience, Bogner succeeds outgoing chair Suzanne Healy, who recently completed her four-year term, having led the board since 2020.

Three new members have also been appointed to the board: Paulette Adams, a tenured professor emeritus at the University of Louisville School of Nursing; independent business owner Scott Surette, a survivor of clerical abuse; and retired clinical social worker Barbara Thorp of the Archdiocese of Boston.

Reappointed to the board for a second term was Vivian M. Akel, a retired licensed clinical social worker who serves as safe environment coordinator for the Maronite Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn.

The board appointments were announced in two separate press releases issued by the USCCB Aug. 1.

The lay-led, 15-member board is a key part of the bishops' commitment to preventing sexual abuse of minors, as detailed in the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," established in 2002 amid a number of emerging clerical abuse scandals. Commonly called the Dallas Charter, the document lays out a comprehensive set of procedures for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of

minors by Catholic clergy, and includes guidelines for reconciliation, healing, accountability and prevention of abuse.

Created in tandem with the charter's adoption, the board works closely with the USCCB to uphold the charter. Among its functions are reviewing the annual report and overall work of the bishops' Secretariat for Child and Youth Protection, alerting the secretariat and its standing committee of issues and making recommendations.

The professional and personal backgrounds of the latest appointees reflect a range of experiences relevant to addressing the issue of sexual abuse in the church.

During his FBI career, Bogner oversaw that agency's internal affairs units, and was also a special agent in charge in several capacities. His positions — which included supervisory roles in the investigation of the 1995 Oklahoma City domestic terrorist attack on the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, and in designing post-9/11 airport security protocols in Nebraska and Iowa — spanned investigations, responses to personnel misconduct, risk analysis and strategic planning. A lifelong Catholic and an active member of the Knights of Columbus, Bogner chairs the Archdiocese of Omaha's advisory review and ministerial misconduct boards, as well as the Missionary Society of St. Columban's U.S. review board.

Advertisement

Surette knows first-hand the trauma of clerical sexual abuse, having been molested at age 15 by an abusive priest in his native Indiana. Four decades of fallout from the abuse led him to seek healing through resources at the Diocese of Lafayette, Indiana, which provided counseling and arranged for a meeting with Lafayette Bishop Timothy L. Doherty. According to the USCCB release, Surette "believes he was given a vision of his abuser through the eyes of Christ," coming to see the now-deceased priest as "a hurt, wounded and lost soul" whom Surette fully forgave, and for whom he now regularly prays.

"This healing and peace have touched every aspect of Mr. Surette's life, and he now wishes to bring this total paradigm shift from anger and vengeance to healing and forgiveness to the Church to help the Church recover from the deep wounds that the sexual abuse scandals have caused," the USCCB press release said.

Adams, a longtime nurse and nursing professor, has 25 years of experience as a nurse legal consultant on malpractice cases handled by several law firms. In addition, she has testified in court as an expert witness. Adams has served on the Archdiocese of Louisville's sexual abuse review board since its creation in 2002, while chairing the archdiocese's Peace and Justice Commission.

Thorp spent 35 years as a clinical social worker for the Archdiocese of Boston, where she also founded and, from 2002 to 2012, directed the archdiocese's Office of Pastoral Support and Outreach, which provides trauma-informed services for clerical abuse survivors, family members and parishes. Thorp assisted with the first papal meeting between clergy abuse survivors and Pope Benedict XVI in April 2008, an encounter led by Cardinal Seán O'Malley. Along with initiating the post-abortion healing ministry Project Rachel in the Boston Archdiocese, Thorp is a board member for Awake, a community of abuse survivors, concerned Catholics and allies responding to the wounds of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

In addition to leading the safe environment office in the Maronite Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn, Akel — a member of the National Review Board since 2020 — serves as a seminary formator and marriage preparation facilitator. She spent 21 years as a school social worker for the New York City Department of Education, and also directed social work at an acute care medical center. Akel maintained a private psychotherapy practice until 2014.

Broglio, who thanked Healy for her leadership and service while welcoming Bogner, said in the release that the board and USCCB committee have experienced an "excellent and collaborative" working relationship.

"We have witnessed great strides and challenges in the continued and ongoing efforts for the Catholic Church in the United States to strengthen and renew her efforts for the protection of young people and the healing of victims," said Broglio. "I thank Mrs. Healy for her longtime service on this most crucial issue, and I look forward to working with the (National Review Board) under the leadership of Mr. Bogner to continue that process in the future."