August 22, 2013

To the Editor:

The Star-Ledger continues not only to distort the truth, but also to leave unsaid the vast amount of work that the Archdiocese of Newark and Archbishop Myers have done to protect children and young people.

Here’s just a small summary:

Nearly 95,000 children annually receive safe environment training through our Catholic schools and through opportunities offered to public school students in our religious education programs.

More than 20,000 clergy, Religious and lay people have received similar safe environment and sexual abuse awareness training. They also receive periodic renewal training.

Similarly, about 20,000 clergy, Religious and lay people have gone through criminal background checks prior to working or volunteering in our parishes and schools.

In accord with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, allegations are sent to the Archdiocesan Review Board composed of highly competent lay professionals with extensive legal, law enforcement and clinical backgrounds.

The Archdiocese, under the direction of the Archbishop, and in accord with a Memorandum of Understanding with the four prosecutors in Bergen, Hudson, Union and Essex counties, reports every allegation of sexual misconduct, regardless of when it may have taken place. The Review Board also reviews allegations at the same time if the person making the allegation wishes to meet with the Board. Most do. Priests in ministry immediately step down from assignment when allegations are made.

Since becoming Archbishop in 2001, Myers has removed 19 priests against whom allegations were substantiated. The Archdiocese, at the direction of the Archbishop, provides counseling and outreach to victims of abuse. Victims are invited to meet with clergy and lay officials of the Archdiocese. There is a full-time office dedicated to protecting children. Individuals who report an allegation of sexual misconduct may do so by calling the Victim's Assistance Coordinator of the Archdiocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection at (201) 407-3256 or the local county prosecutor.
As Archbishop Myers has said publicly before, there is room to improve and the Archdiocese regularly updates and strengthens its policies and practices. The Archdiocese of Newark shows its compassion and concern by our actions because it is the right thing to do. What is not the right thing to do is for the Star-Ledger to make readers believe that none of this happens or to give the impression that Church officials would endanger the welfare of young people.

We are still waiting to see published an investigative piece exposing the financial gains, agendas, backgrounds, lives, and lifestyles of the detractors whom you have been regularly featuring as so-called "protectors of children." Until then, may the Good Lord bless and keep you.

James G. Goodness
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