

2026 Charter Key Take-aways

USCCB-SCYP

Introduction

When the review began in Fall 2021, it was with the instruction from the body of bishops and the Administrative Committee that the *Charter* is not to deviate from its current focus on minors and clergy.

Other than the footnote references, the revised *Charter* does not address in detail cases of sexual abuse involving adults or abuse perpetrated by others in Church service. These matters are more appropriately addressed in canonical processes and are outside of the scope of the *Charter*.

There was a call for clear guidance to assist bishops in implementing canonical penal processes, including the rights of the accused, and assisting penal tribunals in their application of the law.

The *Statement on Episcopal Commitment* remains as is for this revision.

None of the revisions to the text of the *Charter* necessitates changes to the *Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons*.

The *Charter* is scheduled for review again in seven years.

Revisions

The glossary is the newest addition to the 2026 revision.

Among the influences drawn from the revisions of *Book VI* of the Code of Canon Law is the integration of the right of an accused to the presumption of innocence.

Among the *Vos estis lux mundi* (VELM) general provisions is the identification of mandatory Church reporters to complement mandatory reporting to civil authorities.

Additional revisions include the clear allowance for electronic letters of suitability, and an added reference to the protection of information under the seal of the Sacrament of Penance.



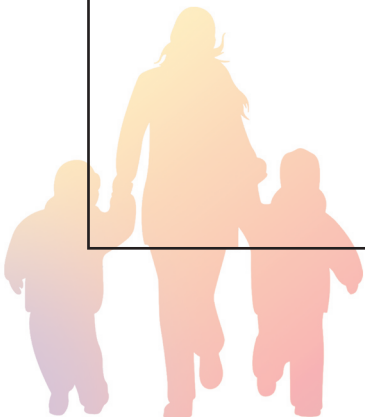
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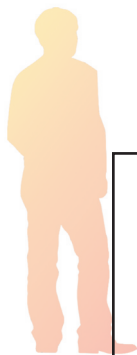


Detailed Comparison

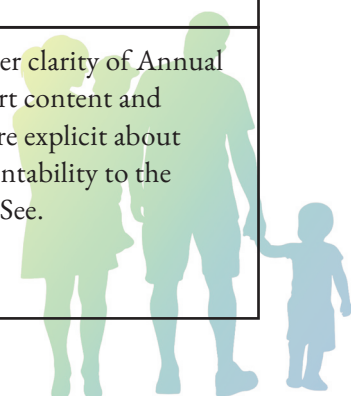


Area	2018 Charter	Revised 2026 Charter	What Changed
Overall Scope	Focused on protecting minors, preventing abuse, responding to allegations, and promote healing survivors.	Retains that focus and makes the scope more explicit as clergy sexual abuse of minors .	The bishops deliberately kept the <i>Charter</i> focused on minors; a separate document is planned for sexual misconduct involving adults and vulnerable adults.
Victim/survivor care - Article 1	Required outreach, healing and reconciliation, including pastoral and other assistance.	More explicitly emphasizes accompaniment and physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being; adds clear explanations of diocesan procedures and reporting processes and timely responses to inquiries.	Care for victim-survivors is more detailed and operational.
Reporting - Article 4	Required reporting allegations to civil authorities and cooperation with investigations.	Retains mandatory civil reporting and explicitly states that personnel must comply with applicable civil laws regardless of when the alleged abuse occurred .	Reporting obligations are clarified and tied more explicitly to civil law.
Seal of Confession	The 2018 revision already added language requiring reporting with “due regard” for the seal of Penance.	Retains this protection and explicitly states that the seal is always inviolable , with citations to current canon law.	More precise canonical formulation rather than a wholly new requirement.
Church reporting mechanisms	Primarily described reporting to civil authorities and canonical authorities.	Adds clearer references to canonical reporting obligations for bishops, clerics and nonordained members of religious institutes; also notes that laypersons serving in Church offices or ministries can report to Church authorities.	The 2026 version incorporates developments from <i>Vos estis lux mundi</i> and other post-2018 canonical norms.



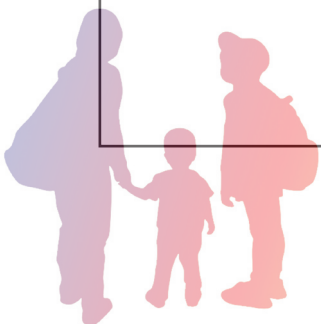


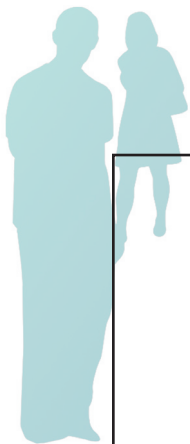
Area	2018 Charter	Revised 2026 Charter	What Changed
Accused clergy/due process - Article 5	An accused priest or deacon was entitled to the presumption of innocence , protection of reputation, and access to civil/canonical counsel.	Defines the presumption more precisely: the accused is presumed innocent from the allegation until confession or canonical conviction; provides for a canonical advocate when the accused cannot obtain one and expressly addresses precautionary measures.	One of the most significant changes: the 2026 text more explicitly balances victim-survivor protection with due process and the rights of accused clergy.
Restoration of reputation	Required efforts to restore an accused cleric's good name when an allegation was unsubstantiated.	Provides more detailed provisions for restoration and possible return to ministry when an investigation or canonical process does not result in conviction, along with continuing support and accompaniment.	The process is more explicitly spelled out.
Communication/transparency - Article 7	Called for openness and transparency while respecting privacy and reputation.	Adds explicit reference to the presumption of innocence when communicating publicly and stresses the integrity of investigations and community safety.	Transparency is now expressly balanced against due process.
National Review Board - Article 10	NRB advised on policies and best practices, reviewed the Secretariat's work and met jointly with the Committee annually.	NRB advises on policies/best practices, reviews the annual report and its recommendations, provides its own assessment to the Conference President, and the NRB and Committee are to meet jointly twice a year .	The NRB's review and advisory role is more clearly defined and strengthened.
Annual reporting	Annual public report on <i>Charter</i> implementation and audits. The conference President would share the Annual Report and Charter revision with the Holy See.	Retains the publication of the Annual Report and adds clarity regarding content. Retains expectation of sharing the Annual Report and revised <i>Charter</i> with the Holy See.	Greater clarity of Annual Report content and is more explicit about accountability to the Holy See.





Area	2018 Charter	Revised 2026 Charter	What Changed
Civil-law status	2018 revision is silent on the relationship of the <i>Charter</i> and civil law and proceedings (exclusive of mandated reporting).	Explicitly states that the Charter is an ecclesial document, has no authority in civil law, and is not intended to affect secular court.	A new clarification of the <i>Charter's</i> legal status and limits.
Safe-environment training - Article 12	Required diocesan safe-environment programs and education for minors, parents, ministers, employees, volunteers and others.	Adds an expectation of continuing education ; expands the description of training program to include identification and reporting of abuse, prevention strategies; expressly includes seminarians and encourages parents/guardians and others to participate.	Training expectations are more detailed and comprehensive.
Background checks - Article 13	Required background evaluation/checks for clergy, employees and volunteers whose duties included contact with minors.	Retains this and clarifies that a cleric serving outside his diocese may have suitability established through a written or electronic attestation from his ordinary/major superior.	Modernizes the suitability process to permit electronic documentation.
Religious institutes - Article 15	Called for cooperation between diocesan bishops and major superiors concerning allegations involving religious clergy.	Retains this but more explicitly establishes consultation between the Committee and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and coordination concerning allegations.	More structured collaboration with religious institutes.
Formation - Article 17	Called for priestly/diaconal formation, chastity and celibacy formation, and assistance in living out vocations faithfully.	Adds an explicit commitment to trauma-informed pastoral-care training for seminarians and updates references to current formation documents.	Formation is broadened to include trauma-informed care.





Area	2018 Charter	Revised 2026 Charter	What Changed
Definitions	No dedicated glossary.	Adds a substantial Glossary , defining terms such as accused, allegation, audit, Church personnel, civil authority, dismissal from the clerical state, presumption of innocence, review board and sexual abuse of a minor.	This is a major structural addition intended to improve consistency and clarity.
Review cycle	<i>Charter</i> was to be reviewed after seven years, with the results presented to the full Conference.	Retains the seven-year review but now specifies confirmation/approval by the full USCCB and reserves authoritative interpretations to the USCCB.	The review mechanism is retained and somewhat more formally described.

Practical Differences

1. The 2026 *Charter* is more legally and canonically precise.

The most important shift is not a retreat from child protection; rather, the revised document incorporates developments in canon law since 2018—including the revised *Book VI* of the Code of Canon Law and *Vos estis lux mundi*—while explicitly addressing **presumption of innocence, canonical counsel, reputation, and due process**.

2. Separates minor protection from adult misconduct.

The 2026 *Charter* is intentionally focused on abuse of **minors**. The USCCB has directed that a separate document be developed concerning sexual misconduct involving adults, including vulnerable adults.

3. Gives victim-survivor accompaniment more concrete treatment.

The 2026 Article 1 goes beyond the general commitment to healing by specifying accompaniment, explanations of procedures, and timely responses. Clarifies that outreach may include counseling, spiritual assistance, support groups and other services agreed upon with the victim/survivor.

4. A glossary and modernizes terminology/processes.

The new glossary is intended to provide greater consistency in how dioceses understand terms such as “allegation,” “accused,” “audit,” “presumption of innocence,” and “sexual abuse of a minor.” The revised *Charter* also expressly permits electronic suitability attestations.

5. Accountability architecture remains.

The 2026 *Charter* does **not** dismantle the core structure established by the *Dallas Charter*: diocesan review boards, the USCCB Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People, the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection, the National Review Board, annual audits/reports, safe-environment programs, civil reporting, and permanent removal from ministry following established sexual abuse of a minor all remain.

