From the Office of Communications

TO: Parishes, Catholic Schools, Diocesan Ministries & Institutions
The following is a statement by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez on the news that the Florida Attorney General has opened an investigation into the Catholic Church's handling of allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy and other church personnel. The announcement was made today in Tampa by Attorney General Pam Bondi.

Please make this statement available to your parishioners, faculty, school families and other stakeholders. The statement is available on the diocesan website at www.dosafl.com/protect. If you are contacted by news media, please refer them to Kathleen Bagg at (904) 262-1705 or 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.