

For this month's Sunday 'Conversations…,' at the Assumptionist Center in Brighton, the community, residents and guests welcomed Dr. Francesco Cesareo, President of Assumption College. However, his purpose in coming was not so much due to his role at the college but to address the focus, goals and challenges of the National Review Board of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, of which he is currently the chair. This board is charged with overseeing and monitoring the bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" which was drafted in response to the sexual abuse crisis in the Church. This completely lay board of thirteen members from all regions of the United States serves as a consultative body to the bishops. It provides an important function in the Church's effort to restore trust and to bring about healing among the faithful.

The membership of the NRB reflects the great diversity of our country with regard to culture, ethnicity, professions and the necessary skills required to be effective. It is an autonomous body without authority to make changes and provides frank communication with and among the bishops. Accountability is a very high priority.

As Dr. Cesareo stated, the NRB's goals include: the yearly review of diocesan audits of the charter, the making of recommendations to the bishops, the noting of whether or not there is compliance of the seventeen areas of the charter and the identification of best practices, the last of which puts great emphasis on the education of children and adults to be able to notice the risks involved in the dangers of abuse and prevention. He noted that across the country there is still a wide range of conformity to the charter. This is being addressed by the NRB at the present time.

Other concerns of the board include: the uneven state of background checks on adults working with children and youth, the frequency of folks going through training, the need for a national

data base for clergy, the process of how local diocesan boards operate regarding policies and practices for child protection and the role and dangers of the internet.

At present the charter itself is under revision and is designed only for diocesan priests and deacon, not members of religious communities. Another concern is the growth of the number of priests coming to the United States from other countries and their education and preparation in ministering in this environment. It was interesting to note that Dr. Cesareo did say that the NRB has made recommendations to the bishops on clergy formation.

In closing he came full circle in stressing that the focus of the charter and service of the board is for all people through the service of the Church.