



# DIOCESE OF GREAT FALLS-BILLINGS

## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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### Independent Review Board

As mandated in the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, Bishop Jeffrey M. Fleming has a group of competent people to turn to for advice. As stated in the Charter,

“Dioceses...will also have a review board that functions as a confidential consultative body to the bishop... The majority of its members will be lay persons not in the employ of the diocese... This board will advise the diocesan...bishop in his assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors and in his determination of suitability for ministry. It will regularly review diocesan...policies and procedures for dealing with sexual abuse of minors. The board can review these matters both retrospectively and prospectively and give advice on all aspects of responses required in connection with these cases”  
(USCCB *Charter and Norms for the Protection of Children and Young People*, Article 12)

Members of the Independent Review Board are:

Teresa McCann-O'Connor, *Chair*  
Nickolas C. Murnion, *Vice Chair/Secretary*  
Rev. Peter Guthneck  
Sister Kathleen Kane, OP  
LaVerne Parker  
Verne Petermann  
Carley C. Robertson, MD  
James E. Seykora

### **Teresa McCann O'Connor**

Teresa McCann O'Connor is the current chair of the Independent Review Board and was originally appointed by Bishop Warfel in September 2008. She was raised, the oldest of nine children on a cattle ranch along the Missouri in northeastern Montana, and was baptized, confirmed and married at St. Anthony's in Culbertson. She attended the Academy of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Mankato, Minnesota, the flagship school of the Sisters of Notre Dame for secondary school, graduating in 1974. From there, she won the Archdiocesan Scholarship (the thankful response of the Vatican for the generosity of the Americans to the Peter's Pence collections) to the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., earning three degrees in six years – a bachelor's Degree in Politics, a master's degree in Library and Information Science, and a Juris Doctorate. When Teresa and her husband, Bill O'Connor, also an attorney, returned to Montana, they settled in Billings. She worked as a Deputy County Attorney in the Yellowstone County Attorney's office, handling a wide variety of major felony litigation and, for much of her tenure, all of the prosecution of sex offenses against children. In 1990, Teresa entered into private practice with her husband, O'Connor and O'Connor, PC. She has recently retired after 40 years of practice. Bill and Teresa have three children, two lawyers

and a doctor, now all married and each having brought them a grandson, much to their delight. Besides serving on the Independent Review Board, Teresa has various hobbies and volunteers her time in various political activities.

### **Nickolas C. Murnion**

Nickolas C. Murnion is the Vice Chair/Secretary of the IRB and currently serves as District Judge of the Sixteenth Judicial District Court at Forsyth, Montana which is a position he has held since March 17, 2016. Prior to that time, he was Valley County Attorney for 6 years at Glasgow and Garfield County Attorney for 30 years at Jordan where he was born and raised on a ranch with four brothers and one sister. He obtained an undergraduate degree in Government from Montana State University (Bozeman) in 1975 and received a law degree from the University of Montana (Missoula) in 1978. In 1998 he received the Profile in Courage award from the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, Massachusetts. He is currently a member of Immaculate Conception Parish in Forsyth. Previously he was a member of St. Raphael's Parish in Glasgow, Montana and St. John the Baptist Parish in Jordan. Mr. Murnion has served on Parish Councils at St. Raphaels and St. John the Baptist and has been involved in the RCIA program. Mr. Murnion was baptized and confirmed at St. John the Baptist and received the sacrament of matrimony in 1987 with his wife, LeAnn. He has two children, Erin and Trevor, and three grandchildren who reside at Cohagen, Montana. He is also a 4th degree member of the Knights of Columbus.

### **Rev. Peter Guthneck**

Fr Peter Guthneck is a native of Wisconsin. He graduated from Edgewood High School of the Sacred Heart in Madison, WI., Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, and Saint Francis Seminary in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. During freshman year in college, Peter was invited by the Catholic Family Movement of Minnesota and Wisconsin to spend summers volunteering at Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation. CFM families had been invited by Father Raymond Nyquist to Rocky Boy.

During his 3rd year of Theology Peter transferred from Madison Diocese to the Diocese of Great Falls, Montana and was ordained in May of 1971.

From July 1971 to August 1977 Peter served the parishes in Poplar, Brockton, and Ft Kipp. During these years Peter was a participant in a three-year study travel program through Montana State University at Bozeman called Kellogg Education Extension Program. The study/travel included State, National and International. From August 1977 until retirement July 2018 Peter served as pastor of the parishes on the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation, in Box Elder and in Big Sandy. He has served many years on the Clergy Personnel Board. Under Bishop Murphy and Bishop Milone, he was Vicar for Native American Ministry. He has served as a Consultor and has been on the Priest's Council. At present he is on the Board of Directors for the Catholic Foundation of Eastern Montana.

### **Sister Kathleen Kane, OP**

A native of St. Louis, Sr. Kathleen entered the Sparkill Dominican Congregation in New York. After completing a BS in Education (St. Thomas Aquinas College) she graduated

with an MA in Religious Studies from St. Louis University. Post graduate studies included School Administration (Fontbonne University) Adult Education and Business Administration (Montana State University) Criminal Justice and Juvenile Justice (University of Missouri) CPE in Prison Ministry (State Correctional Ctr. Shelton, WA) and Spanish Language Certification Cuernavaca, Mexico. Educational ministry included teaching and school administration in New York, St. Louis and Montana.

Sister Kathleen initiated prison ministry, GED and art programs in Cascade County Jail, participated as a Guardian ad Litem in Cascade County; Diocesan Director of Social Justice, Diocesan CCHD Director and Board Member of the National Catholic Campaign for Human Development. Sister was a member of Roundtable, a national organization for social action and was awarded a NETWORK Legislative Advocacy scholarship in Washington, D.C. Sister was a diocesan representative to the Montana Association of Churches, served on the Diocesan Court of Equity and Las Casas Board, (Dominican Leadership Conference) and President of the Sparkill Dominican Congregation. Sister Kathleen was Diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator and served as Victim Assistant Coordinator from 2003-2015. Sister has ministered in the Parishes of Big Sandy, Box Elder and Rocky Boy Indian Reservation.

#### **LaVerne Parker**

LaVerne Parker was appointed to the Board by Bishop Jeffrey Fleming. She has served a lay volunteer catechist for St. Mary Catholic Church, Rocky Boy and was the volunteer facilitator for Virtus training for the parish. She is a licensed Registered Nurse with the State of Montana. She retired as the Quality Director at the Chippewa Cree Health Center and was a Member of the Chippewa-Cree Judicial Commission. She has been the Director of Nursing Education, ANC, Fort Belknap Agency, Her education includes being a FLAG Fellow, Minnesota Hartford Center of Geriatric Excellence; MSN, Rural Health Nursing, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND; and BSN, Washburn University, Topeka, KS.

#### **Verne Petermann**

Verne Petermann was born and raised in Wibaux, Montana, and received his A.A. degree from Dawson College in 1967. He served in the US Army, 82nd Airborne Division from 1969 to 1971. He received his B.A. degree from Eastern Montana College in 1976. He served in the Billings Police Department from 1976 to 2006 and is currently retired. He has been active in Critical Incident Stress Management, Victim Services, Family Violence Intervention, and the Attorney General's Anti-Terrorism Task Force. He married Karen Lemm in 1983. Karen has been teaching in the Catholic schools since 1976 and is currently Principal of St. Francis Primary. They have three children and are members of St. Thomas Parish. Verne joined the church in 1982, having been baptized and confirmed at Little Flower Parish. He represented Little Flower Parish on the Billings Catholic School Board from 1994 to 2000. He was part of Marriage Encounter Team 1984 to 1989 and Cursillo in 1993. He is an associate member of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth.

#### **Carley C. Robertson, MD**

Dr. Carley Robertson was appointed to the Board by Bishop Warfel in the summer of 2021. She was born in Cut Bank, MT and reared in Butte, MT. Her father (a chemical engineer)

was a native of Bozeman, and her mother (a chemist) a native of Great Falls. Carley grew up a block north of the Immaculate Conception Church in Butte but attended various Protestant churches. She was confirmed and baptized at the Mountain View Methodist Church in Butte, MT. She began regularly attending the Catholic Church upon moving to Havre and joining St Jude Thaddeus Parish via RCIA in the 1990s.

Carley began college at Montana Tech in Butte, while there becoming an EMT. She graduated in 1978 with a BS in Pre-Medicine from Montana State University (Bozeman). She was a WWAMI student and graduated from the University of Washington (Seattle) School of Medicine in 1982. From 1982-84 she was a surgical resident at the University of Colorado (Denver) Health Sciences Center. In 1984, she returned to north central Montana and opened a general practice in Conrad, Montana and worked there (24/7) for the next several years.

Dr. Robertson was an Emergency Room physician at the (then) Columbus Hospital for a year, and then was invited to return to general practice at the (then) Havre Clinic, so that one of their regular physicians could return to a residency for more training. She practiced four to five more years in Havre, and following the clinic's purchase by the hospital, then did other work.

Carley has been blessed to be able to travel, sometimes providing medical services. With United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM), from 2005 to 2014, she traveled to Angola, Wyoming, China, Nepal and Brazil. During 2011 to 2019, with International Evangelism Outreach (IEO), she has been able to travel to northern Tanzania and participate in their medical work several times.

Dr. Robertson currently is Medical Director for Big Sandy Medical Center, Sweet Memorial Nursing Home (Chinook), and Hi-Line Retirement Center (Malta), where she oversees the medical work of the facilities, and Medical Director for Blaine County Ambulances.

### **James E. Seykora**

James E. Seykora was fortunate enough to be born and raised a Roman Catholic by his devout parents. Seventeen years of his nineteen years of education were in Catholic institutions, including undergraduate and Law School at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. His wife, Sue, is a registered nurse and they have been blessed with six wonderful children (elementary school teacher, nuclear engineer, Montana FWP employee, three registered nurses) and now thirteen grandchildren and one great- grandchild.

Jim has been on the Big Horn County Memorial Hospital Board for 42 years and a member of the Knights of Columbus for 47 years, a member of St. Joseph's Parish in Hardin for almost 49 years, a member of the pastoral council and currently chair. He has been involved in law enforcement for about 45 years. As a young lawyer, he was in private practice from 1972-1984; overlapping was his stint as Big Horn County Attorney from 1975-1984. In 1984, he became an Assistant United States Attorney in Montana (1984- 2012) and was the lead OCDETF (Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force) attorney for Montana and the criminal chief for nine years. He was awarded the U.S. Department of Justice "Attorney General's Exceptional Service Award" (highest award given by the U.S. Dept. of Justice) in relation to prosecuting the Montana Freeman. After retirement from the Federal Government in 2012, Jim agreed to assist the Billings Municipal Court as a pro tem judge on a parttime basis. In 2015, the City of Hardin asked him to become their city judge. Jim agreed and has been on the bench in Hardin since that time.