

Diocese of Des Moines
Addressing Clerical Sexual Abuse of Minors
Progress, Healing & Prevention

Introduction

The Catholic Church in Southwest Iowa mourns the abuse suffered by children and young people at the hands of those who were to lead them to Christ, but instead violated this sacred trust. The pain experienced by the victims, their families, and faithful Catholics can be very difficult. Bishop Richard Pates and all church leadership in the Diocese of Des Moines offer apology to all victims for their hurt and the impact abuse has had in their lives.

Rationale for Compiling a List

More than apologies, what the victims and faithful deserve is a full accounting, to the best of our knowledge, of the extent of abuse. For victims and our broader community, healing will be more possible as church leadership acknowledges the transgressions of our clergy. Further, we hope the sharing of this list will encourage other victims to come forward to report abuse. Toward that end, the Diocese of Des Moines has prepared for release a list of those priests who have had allegations of sexual abuse of minors substantiated.

Methodology: Criteria Used

It is important to note that in all but two cases, the names on the list were released publicly as victims' allegations surfaced, were studied, and actions were taken.

The Allegation Review Committee – a group of mostly laypeople who provide consultation and recommendation to the bishop in matters involving the protection of children, including, as the name suggests, allegations against priests – has **substantiated** the allegations against these priests. By substantiated, we mean they have determined there to be “sufficient evidence to establish reasonable grounds to believe that the alleged abuse occurred.” We have developed a document, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), to provide more information on this and related issues of our methodology, which can be found at www.dmdiocese.org/victim-assistance.

As referenced prior, most of the priests on the list had allegations made against them while they were living, and the diocese was able to study the allegations in a thorough process involving interviewing the complainant, other witnesses, and the accused. The accused priest often had an advocate to provide for his defense, accorded by church law. Following each investigation, the Allegation Review Committee made a determination on whether the allegation could be substantiated.

In some cases, a single allegation was reported to the diocese only after the death of the priest, sometimes years after his death and decades after the alleged abuse. Since these single claims cannot be fully substantiated, they are not included. We are including, however, priests with

multiple allegations made after death. In one case, these allegations were made publicly. For more information, please see the FAQ.

Beyond the names of this list, it is important to understand the particular context and history within which abuse was perpetrated, as well as the reform the American Church, including this diocese, has been committed to for almost 20 years.

History

Examining this issue in our diocese and nationwide, we can discern three noticeable movements or timeframes:

1. The decades before 2002 -- the period between 1940 and 2002 which the Boston Globe series in the early 2000s and Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report in 2018 cover
2. From 2002 to present day -- beginning with the enactment of United States bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*
3. Most recently, there is the revelation in the past year of the criminal behavior of Theodore McCarrick

Before 2002

The overwhelming majority of sexual abuse by clergy occurred between 1940-2002. Such behavior cannot be condoned. The abuse, as well as the failure by some church leaders, is a source of shame for the Church.

The John Jay College of Criminal Justice provided analysis and insight of this era and we encourage your consulting this carefully documented record.

The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950-2002, published February 2004

The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010, First printing, May 2011

Among their key findings were:

- 4 percent of all priests in ministry in the United States between 1950 and 2002 were accused of sexually abusing minors.
- More abuse occurred in the 1970s than any other decade, peaking in late 1970s and sharply declining by 1985.
- There is no single cause of sexual abuse of minors by priests but “Social and cultural changes in the 1960s and 1970s manifested in increased levels of deviant behavior in the general society and also among priests of the Catholic Church in the United States.”

The history of abuse in our diocese follows a similar trajectory:

- Of the number of priests who have ministered in the Diocese of Des Moines, 1.7 % have substantiated allegations of abuse. However, we know one substantiated allegation is one too many.

- Abuse peaked in the 1970s with 22 substantiated allegations in that timeframe, involving four priests, representing 50% of all substantiated allegations.
- In the past thirty years, the one **substantiated** allegation of sexual abuse of a minor by a cleric took place in 1997 and was reported a decade later.

For information on the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report, Commonwealth published, “The PA Grand-Jury Report: Not what it seems,” by Peter Steinfelds, March 21, 2019.

To access the resources cited above, go to dm-diocese.org/victim-assistance.

While in no way can evil behavior of certain clergy be justified, the three foregoing resources help us appreciate the complexity of the picture both in society and Church during this period of our history.

From 2002 to Present Day

With the U.S. bishops’ enactment of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* in 2002 (available on our website), the American Church has taken dramatic and effective action in addressing the issue of clerical sexual abuse. The bishops remain vigilant, having updated the national charter three times (2005, 2011 and 2018).

The charter initiated mandatory actions that the Diocese of Des Moines has followed diligently. Our diocese first enacted a policy in 1988, and then revised it to comply with the charter in 2002. Our diocesan policy, updated in 2016, outlines several key practices:

1) Caring for the Victims

Victims are the number one concern and the focus of diocesan outreach. The diocese is committed to the healing of the victims. Most victims are now in their 50s or older. For many, the trauma has been severe and the diocese reaches out to facilitate healing to the greatest extent possible. Counseling services are offered to victims of abuse. The diocese has settled \$3 million in claims stemming from abuse. Sources of these funds include \$1 million from insurance coverage and the remainder from interest income from diocesan reserve funds, including proceeds and investment income from the sale of the former bishop’s residence. Sources do not include diocesan operations funding (i.e. the Annual Diocesan Appeal).

2) Reporting of sexual abuse

- a. The availability of a third party Victim Assistance Advocate, not employed by the Church, for reporting to ensure an investigation and due process.
- b. Each accusation of sexual abuse of a minor reported to the Diocese of Des Moines is immediately turned over to law enforcement for investigation no matter when the alleged abuse occurred.

3) Zero tolerance

Any priest for whom it has been established has committed an act of sexual abuse of a minor is permanently removed from Church ministry. “One strike and you’re out.” Thus, the impossibility after the first report of substantiated abuse of multiplying future abuse in the Church context.

4) Transparency and Accountability to the Community

In addition to turning the allegation over to law enforcement, the diocese removes the accused from any public ministry and makes the allegation public.

For the past 15 years, an Allegation Review Committee has served the bishop and people well by providing accountability and transparency on behalf of the community. Currently chaired by a Council Bluffs attorney, the committee includes a police chief, a district court judge, a retired teacher, a psychologist, a permanent deacon and a priest. Together, the committee advises the bishop on all matters related to sexual abuse and misconduct and regularly reviews diocesan policies and procedures.

5) Prevention

Since the establishment of the Charter in 2002, the Diocese of Des Moines has conducted **18,525 background checks and safe environment training programs for every employee, volunteer, member of the clergy or religious community, and seminarian.** This check includes county, state and national records on criminal history, watch lists, and state and national sexual abuse registries. In addition, safe environment training must be completed before being accepted into the role they are seeking. To put this into context, **almost 17% of the total Catholics in the diocese have received background screening and child protection training.** Safe environment also includes education of children at their respective level.

All ministers in the diocese are required to complete monthly safe environment readings to continue to learn ways to identify grooming behavior, provide a safe environment for children, and appropriately respond to an allegation. In fact, during Bishop Pates’ time in the diocese, safe environment awareness led parish leadership to express concerns about a priest. These concerns were provided to bishop, which led to an investigation that eventually uncovered allegations of abuse of a minor from decades ago. The priest has been laicized. This situation made clear the effectiveness of good training, receptivity by the diocese to take seriously the concerns reported, and immediate action once allegations surfaced.

Additionally, visiting deacons and priests from outside the diocese are required to submit a personal statement of suitability from their home bishop/diocese, attesting they have gone through similar background and safety screening.

Nationwide, this combination of background checks, training and vigilance is making a difference. When we look at all the accusations **nationally** in the past three years, **22 allegations (but not necessarily confirmed) of recent abuse were reported between 2015-17**. That comes from a population of approximately 72 million Catholics nationwide.

Even one instance of abuse is too many and the only acceptable number is zero. At the same time, in the state of Pennsylvania alone (where the grand jury report was released) 42 teachers lost their licenses for sexual misconduct in 2017 alone. Our prevention methods and strong zero tolerance policies are working.

6) Commitment to Compliance

We have faithfully implemented and administered the national reforms initiated in 2002. To provide accountability, the U.S. Bishops mandated annual audits for adherence to policies and procedures of the Charter. An independent, national auditor StoneBridge Business Partners provides the annual audit. Every third year this exercise is “on-site,” where files are reviewed, personnel are interviewed, and procedures tested, similar to financial audits in the business world. The other two years the audit is done in writing. This past fall, StoneBridge found the Diocese of Des Moines in compliance with the national charter. The diocese has been compliant with each review since they began in 2003.

The criminal conduct of Theodore McCarrick

While the Diocese of Des Moines, along with dioceses throughout the country, have changed through reform, we know we still need to be vigilant. Over the past year, it became public that Theodore McCarrick, a former cardinal in the Catholic Church, was guilty of sexual abuse of minors while being promoted to high offices of responsibility in the Church. This shows us our Catholic Church must remain attentive to ending the abuse of children and young people. McCarrick was “defrocked,” or returned to the lay state and relegated to a private life of “prayer and penance.”

Additional reform applying to bishops of the American Church has been proposed. It includes:

- A third party reporting system with no connection to the institutional church established in order that allegations will be received and acted upon without prejudice
- Implementing a code of conduct for bishops
- Establishing disciplinary measures for bishops found guilty of misconduct.

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, met with all the presidents of the bishop’s conferences throughout the world February 21-24 to raise worldwide awareness in order to begin the process of global reform. The outcome was determination to overcome sexual abuse by clergy by establishing procedures already activated in the United States worldwide. Such a step is in line with the global identity of the “Catholic” Church.

Committed to Go Forward

We have made significant steps forward.

Publishing a list of those priests who have substantiated allegations of abuse against them is only one action. We remain committed and focused in our efforts to protect our children, in our parishes, our schools and throughout our community. We conduct robust background screening and have comprehensive and rigorous safe environment training.

We will continue to respond to allegations of abuse with transparency and accountability, and will update the list for the public as allegations are substantiated.

To report abuse, please contact law enforcement or Sam Porter, with Polk County Crisis and Advocacy. Mr. Porter serves as a 3rd party victim assistance advocate, he does not work for the diocese. Mr. Porter can be reached at 515-286-2015 or Sam.Porter@polkcountyiowa.gov.