

# **DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE'S RESPONSE TO ILLINOIS ATTORNEY GENERAL'S FINAL REPORT**

## **The Diocese Apologizes For Past Shortcomings in Responding to Abuse Allegations**

- The Diocese is still in the process of reviewing the Illinois Attorney General's report, which is nearly 700 pages long and addresses many different topics at length. Still, the Diocese believes it is important to provide an immediate overall response.
- First, the Diocese acknowledges that several decades ago certain of its priests engaged in inexcusable sexual misconduct that caused serious harm to children.
- The Diocese humbly and unreservedly apologizes for its inadequate response to some of those abuse allegations in past decades. The Diocese prays for the continued recovery of all survivors of such abuse.
- The Diocese has, however, made great strides over the past three decades in correcting its past mistakes. The Diocese pledges, moreover, that those past mistakes have not been—and will not in the future be—repeated.
- The Diocese is fully committed to continue protecting the safety of all children entrusted to its care and doing everything it can to prevent them from suffering any form of abuse.

## **The Diocese Has Been a Consistent Leader in Combating Childhood Sexual Abuse**

- For more than 30 years, the Diocese has been a national leader in developing policies to address the unmitigated evils of child sexual abuse.
- In 1993, the Diocese became one of the first Catholic dioceses in the nation to implement a written Child Protection Policy designed to lessen or prevent instances of abuse.
- Also in 1993, the Diocese formed a lay-majority independent Review Board to consider allegations of abuse against Diocesan clerics and make recommendations to the Bishop regarding their disposition. To date, all such recommendations have been followed.
- In 2002, under the leadership of then-Bishop Wilton Gregory of the Diocese of Belleville, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved and implemented the landmark Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which established nationwide measures to better protect children from sexual abuse.

## **The Diocese Puts the Safety of Children First**

- For decades, the Diocese has reported ALL allegations of child sexual abuse by Diocesan clerics to law enforcement authorities. Such reports are made even if the alleged abuse occurred many years earlier and without regard to whether the allegation appears credible.
- If the Diocese receives an abuse allegation against a still-active cleric, the Diocese directs the accused cleric be removed from the ministry setting while the allegation is investigated.
- Allegations of clerical sexual abuse are submitted for consideration and recommendation to the lay-majority Review Board.
- A cleric with even one credible allegation of child sexual abuse is permanently removed from ministry and placed on the Diocese's public list of credibly accused clerics.

### **The Diocese's Child Protection Policies Have Had a Clear Positive Impact**

- More than 99% of credible allegations of child sexual abuse by Diocesan clerics occurred before the Diocese established its child protection measures in 1993, even though many legal claims did not surface until much later.
- In the last 30 years, there have only been two credible abuse allegations made against Diocesan clerics, neither of which involved physical contact with any child. Both clerics were immediately removed from ministry.

### **The Diocese's Education, Training, and Transparency Initiatives**

- For many years, the Diocese has conducted background screenings for employees and volunteers and provided comprehensive safe-environment training programs for adults and children. This includes more than 19,000 criminal background checks.
- Last year alone, the Diocese trained nearly 7,600 children in an age-appropriate manner on how to recognize, resist, and report potentially abusive behavior.
- To date, the Diocese has trained almost 31,000 adults on a variety of child abuse topics.
- For at least the last 30 years, the Diocese has publicly announced the removal from ministry of any Diocesan cleric credibly accused of child sexual abuse, and no such cleric has been transferred to a different parish.
- Since 2018, the Diocese has published on its website the names of all clerics credibly accused of child sexual abuse that have a meaningful ecclesiastical connection with the Diocese. This includes all Diocesan priests and deacons and all religious order and extern clerics that have ministered in the Diocese, regardless of whether they are living or deceased and regardless of the date of the alleged incident of abuse.
- The Diocese regularly updates its public list of credibly accused clerics as it receives additional information.

### **There Are No Credibly Accused Clerics in Ministry in the Diocese Today**

- No priest or deacon incardinated in the Diocese and currently ministering here has ever been the subject of a credible allegation of child sexual abuse.
- Likewise, to the best of the Diocese's knowledge, no religious order cleric ministering in the Diocese today has ever been the subject of a credible abuse allegation.
- Before the Diocese will permit a religious order cleric to minister here on anything other than a temporary basis, he must first successfully pass a background check. Further, the leader of the cleric's religious order must certify in writing that the cleric has no known history of inappropriate behavior with children and is unreservedly recommended for ministry in the Diocese.
- The Diocese has previously asked the Illinois Attorney General's Office to share any information suggesting that any Diocesan or religious order cleric currently ministering in the Diocese has or might have abused a child. And the Diocese publicly repeats that request today. It very much wants the Attorney General's help to ensure that no cleric credibly accused of child sexual abuse remains in ministry here.

- The Attorney General's report includes graphs that appear to suggest that even today, there are or may be credibly accused clerics in our Diocese in active ministry. Any such suggestion is inaccurate.
- **To reiterate and emphasize: to the best of the Diocese's current knowledge, there are no credibly accused Diocesan or religious order clerics ministering in the Diocese today.** If the Illinois Attorney General has any information to the contrary, we again respectfully request that any such information be shared immediately so the Diocese can take appropriate action.

### **The Diocese's Next Steps**

- The Diocese will continue to carefully study the Attorney General's report and give serious consideration to its contents and recommendations. If it concludes that changes to its existing policies are necessary and appropriate to better protect children from abuse, it will publicly announce such changes and post them on its website and social media accounts.
- The Diocese will also seek to schedule meetings with the leader of each religious order with clerics that minister in the Diocese. The purpose of these meetings will be to discuss and assess whether existing policies governing the activities of such clerics in the Diocese can be improved or enhanced to further protect children. Again, any changes to such policies will be publicly announced and posted on the Diocese's website and social media accounts.