



Catholic Diocese of Evansville

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A Message from Bishop Joseph M. Siegel

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The tragedy of the sexual abuse of minors by clergy has been in our prayers, hearts and minds in a particularly profound way these past several months since the release of the grand jury report in Pennsylvania. The heart-wrenching accounts of abuse have reminded us of the pain experienced by victims which can last an entire lifetime. Families, too, experience a deep trauma when a member is victimized. As Bishop of this Diocese, I ask the forgiveness of those who suffered sexual abuse by members of the clergy, no matter how long ago, as well as of all the people of the Church. As I offer Mass each day, I pray for victims and their families and for all those whose lives and faith have been impacted by this scandal.

In response to a request by victims and their families, I announced at the end of September that the Diocese would prepare a list of names and current status of priests who had credible allegations of sexual abuse of minors. The survivors and family members with whom I spoke shared that such a listing would not only help bring healing to their ordeal, but also could be the impetus for other victims to come forward for assistance when they realize they were not the only ones hurt by an offending cleric. This practice has been followed by many other dioceses, including those in Indiana.

The Diocese already had the names of priest offenders that were published in *The Message* over the years. However, in order to prepare as complete and accurate a listing as possible, the Diocese hired the services of a private investigator to review all priests' files, dating back to the founding of the Diocese of Evansville in 1944. This review process, conducted from this past October to mid-December, entailed going through thousands of pages of material concerning the 240 diocesan priests and 108 religious order and extern priests (priests from other dioceses) who have served in the Diocese over the past 75 years. All allegations of sexual abuse of minors found in the files were then presented to the Diocesan Review Board for its study, evaluation and recommendations. This extensive review process has resulted in the listing published today in this paper and on the websites of the Diocese of Evansville and *The Message*.

As you can read in the report, 10 diocesan priests and 2 priests from religious orders have credible allegations of sexual abuse/misconduct with youth under the age of 18, or with adults who habitually lack the use of reason. Most of the allegations were already made public in years past in *The Message*. While recognizing that most of the offenses happened decades ago, we know that the pain of the abuse continues for victims long beyond the event. It is my prayer that this release of names will not re-traumatize those who have suffered. Parishioners may be shocked to see in this listing the names of priests who served their parishes in the past. I deeply regret the hurt this revelation may cause.

Since 2002, the Church has made progress in addressing clergy sexual abuse of minors. With the implementation of *The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Essential Norms*, our Diocese and those across our nation have instituted:

- a zero-tolerance policy toward those who abuse;
- prompt reporting of allegations to civil authorities;
- a diocesan review board to examine allegations;
- a victim assistance coordinator to be a liaison between victims and the diocese;
- and youth protection training and background checks for all adults who work with minors.

The Diocese also has in place a rigorous protocol for accepting candidates for the seminary, including thorough psychological testing. As well, seminaries place great priority on the human/emotional formation and evaluation of candidates throughout their preparation for ordination. I am firmly committed to the strict enforcement of these provisions. While no policy is perfect, these efforts have made a significant difference in preventing abuse of minors in the Church and better responding to victims when abuse is reported.

With the help of God's grace, we will continue as a Diocese to confront the evil of clergy sexual abuse, recognizing the harm it has caused so many over past decades. I hope and pray that this release of the names of priest offenders is one more step forward in the process of healing and restoration. Please continue to pray for all those wounded by this tragedy, especially victims and their families. Please remember as well our priests who faithfully serve the people of this local Church.

Through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God, may we always look to Jesus for healing, courage, wisdom and strength – that the Church may be renewed in the Lord's image and likeness.

Bishop Joseph M. Siegel