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Glossary and FAQs

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Glossary:

Canon law

A set of ordinances and regulations made by ecclesiastical authority, for the government of a Christian organization or church and its members. Canon law covers such things as the process of religious service, criteria for baptism, funerals, prohibited conduct, church property, and internal boards which have jurisdiction over Church matters.

Core Advisory Group

A group made up of the Vicar General, Moderator of the Curia, Chancellor, Director of Professional Standards and Oversight, and General Counsel, which advises the Bishop about claims against clergy and seminarians.

Credibly accused

The allegation of sexual abuse of a minor has a “semblance of truth” under canon law, using a standard of proof approximating probable cause, as described in the [Ministerial Review Board Policy](#), Section 6.5.

Faculties

Permission granted to clergy that enables them to practice public ministry within a certain diocese.

Incardination

Term used by the Catholic Church to describe the relationship between a cleric and the diocese or religious order to which he is attached and the superior (e.g., bishop, prelate, religious superior) to which he is accountable and who, in turn, is responsible for him. Clerics must be attached to a particular Church or religious institute.

Laicized

A cleric is dismissed from the clerical state by the Pope, either at the petition of the cleric or at the petition of the diocese, and no longer has the rights and responsibilities of ordination, and is now considered part of the laity.

Ministerial Review Board (MRB)

As described in the Ministerial Review Board Policy, a local board that functions as a confidential consultative body to the Bishop. The MRB advises the Bishop regarding alleged misconduct by clergy, including misconduct relating to the sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult, and the Bishop's determination of the suitability for ministry of a member of the clergy. See [Ministerial Review Board Policy](#).

Minor/Child

Anyone under the age of 18 or a person who is at least 18 years old and a student who is in high school and has not reached their 19th birthday. For more information, see [Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful](#), Section 2.11.

Ordination

Process of elevating a lay person to clerical status.

Publicly accused

Priests, seminarians, or other religious who were either incardinated in the Diocese of Fall River or who were assigned to public ministry in the Diocese of Fall River, and have been publicly named in media reports, third party lists prepared by advocacy groups and/or other dioceses and religious orders, as having allegations against them involving sexual abuse of a minor. The individuals included are clergy or other religious against whom a publicized accusation was made, but for whom the Diocese lacks sufficient information at this time to make its own determination whether the accusation was credible. In some cases, a religious order or other diocese may have determined that the priest was credibly accused after investigation or upon admission of the priest. For more information, see FAQs below.

Restricted, Suspended, or Removed from Ministry

Not permitted to practice public ministry

Sexual Abuse of a Child

Sexual molestation or sexual exploitation of a child and other behavior by which an adult uses a child as an object of sexual gratification, this includes any act or interaction whether it involves genital or physical contact, with or without consent, even if initiated by the child, which involves sexual contact, molestation or sexual exploitation of a child by an adult, whether physical injuries are sustained or not. For more information, see the [Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful](#), Section 2.4.

Unsubstantiated

The allegation of sexual abuse of a minor does not have a “semblance of truth.” This may mean the allegation was withdrawn or recanted; after an investigation, it was determined the allegation lacked merit; and/or the information was insufficient to assess credibility.

FAQs:

Assembling the List

How did the Diocese review its files in creating the accused list?

The Diocese embarked on a comprehensive review of its records beginning in 2019. This review process involved internal examination by Diocesan officials, and experts engaged by the Diocese, including former law enforcement and outside legal counsel. Recommendations were made to the Bishop, who made the final determination regarding the list. For additional information about the process, see [here](#).

Did outside experts review the Diocese’s files?

Yes. The Gavin Group, Kinsale Management Consulting, Ropes & Gray, LLP, and Ed Davis, former Boston Police Commissioner, and his team at The Edward Davis Company, were involved in the file review process. For additional information, see [here](#).

How did the Diocese determine that an allegation of sexual abuse against a minor was “credible”?

The Diocese applied the definition used in its [Ministerial Review Board Policy](#), section 6.5. Credibility means that the allegation of sexual abuse of a minor has a “semblance of truth” under canon (Church) law, using a standard of proof that approximates probable cause.

What is the difference between the credibly accused and publicly accused lists?

Both the credibly accused and publicly accused lists include priests, seminarians, and other religious who were either incardinated in the Diocese of Fall River or publicly ministered within the Diocese of Fall River. Those on the credibly accused list had allegations made against them which the Diocese was able to determine were credible after its own investigation, because they met the semblance of truth standard previously defined.

All individuals listed in the publicly accused category have been publicly named in media reports, third party lists prepared by advocacy groups and/or other dioceses and religious orders, as having allegations against them involving sexual abuse of a minor. For those in this category, a publicized accusation was made, but – unlike those in the credibly accused category – the Diocese lacks sufficient information at this time to make its own determination whether the accusation was credible. Note that in some cases, a religious order or other diocese may have determined that the priest was credibly accused after investigation or upon admission of the priest. See also the question and answer immediately below.

If a priest’s name is on the publicly accused list, does that mean that he is accused of abusing a child in the Diocese of Fall River?

Not necessarily. For example, a priest may have been publicly accused of abuse in another diocese or may appear on a credibly accused list for a religious order for allegations unrelated to the Diocese of Fall River. If we were able to confirm that the priest also worked in the Diocese of Fall River at some point in his career, we have included the priest on the publicly accused list even if the Diocese did not itself receive an allegation regarding that priest.

What’s the difference between restricted, suspended, and removed, in the status field?

Over the years, the Diocese has used various terminology when preventing a priest from practicing public ministry. For purposes of the priest’s status, there is no discernible difference between “restricted,” “suspended,” or “removed” from public ministry. In all cases, this means that the priest may not practice public ministry.

Why are some priests laicized whereas others are restricted, suspended, and/or removed?

There are many factors the Diocese considers when disciplining a priest for misconduct. The Bishop has the authority to restrict a priest from public ministry. The laicization process can take many years and ultimately goes through the Vatican. The appropriate measure for each individual priest is a fact-intensive inquiry and varies depending on the specific circumstances. In every case, the Diocese is guided by its commitment to protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse, and to disciplining any Diocesan personnel who commit abuse.

Why is some assignment history or other information not provided for priests who were incardinated in a diocese other than Fall River or are members of a religious order?

For priests who were incardinated in another diocese or were members of a religious order, the Diocese often lacked complete information about the priest, including assignment history. However, the Diocese has included assignments within the Diocese of Fall River and other information about the priest, based on the records and information from official sources available to the Diocese.

Handling Abuse Allegations Today

What is the Diocese's process for handling allegations of sexual abuse of minors?

When an allegation is received, the Core Advisory Group will conduct a preliminary investigation. Unless such allegation is manifestly false, the Diocese will conduct further investigation and take appropriate steps, such as placing the cleric on administrative leave; preventing the cleric from having any contact with minors, the alleged victim, and the victim's family; prohibiting the cleric from ministering publicly; and other actions as the Bishop sees fit. The Diocese also reports allegations it receives regarding sexual abuse of minors to law enforcement, and is committed to cooperating with any investigations by law enforcement and civil authorities, in accordance with Massachusetts law. For additional information, see the [Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful](#).

How do I report an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor by a person affiliated with the Diocese, including clergy, staff, and volunteers?

Anyone may [report an incident of abuse](#) to any Diocesan clergy, staff, or volunteer or by contacting the Diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator, Carolyn Shipp. Note that the Diocese follows mandatory reporting requirements and cooperates with law enforcement and civil authorities, in accordance with Massachusetts law. Further information is also available at the [Office of Safe Environment](#).

Keeping Our Community Safe

When were the Diocesan policies about child protection and safety last updated?

In July 2020. Please see the [Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful](#).

Does this policy apply to volunteers and staff, as well as clergy?

Yes. Please see Section 2.7 of the [Diocesan Policy Protecting the Faithful](#).

What is the Ministerial Review Board?

Please see the glossary definition of Ministerial Review Board (MRB), provided [here](#), as well as the [Ministerial Review Board Policy](#) for more information.

In addition to policies, how does the Diocese prevent sexual abuse of minors?

As part of its safe environment program, the Diocese requires all personnel to submit to a background check, agree to a code of conduct, and complete Safe Environment Training. The training, which is required of clergy, lay employees, and volunteers, provides awareness and knowledge to ensure a safe environment within the Diocese. The Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful has detailed instructions for Diocesan personnel that receive allegations of abuse. In addition, many Diocesan personnel are mandatory reporters. The Diocese has a dedicated [Victim Assistance Coordinator](#), who must be a licensed social worker or a licensed mental health professional. The Victim Assistance Coordinator is the first point of contact when an allegation is received and works closely with the Bishop to ensure that the Diocese is adequately addressing the rights and needs of any victims. Carolyn Shipp, the Diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator, can be reached at (508) 985-6508 or at cshipp@dioc-fr.org. The Diocese is also committed to cooperating with law enforcement and civil investigations into abuse, including reporting allegations received to law enforcement.

Procedures After an Allegation

What happens to a priest who is accused of sexually abusing a minor?

The Diocese reports allegations it receives regarding sexual abuse of minors to law enforcement and is committed to cooperating with any investigations by law enforcement and civil authorities in accordance with Massachusetts law. From a Diocesan perspective, the Core Advisory Group first conducts a preliminary investigation into the allegation. If the Core Advisory Group determines that the allegation is not manifestly false, they will advise the Bishop. A more fulsome investigation may then be conducted. While an investigation is pending, the priest will not be allowed to practice public ministry; is prevented from having any contact with minors, the alleged victim and the victim's family; and is subject to other restrictions as the Bishop sees fit. The results of the investigation will be presented to the Ministerial Review Board for further deliberation on the appropriate course of action. The MRB reviews the allegations, considers evidence, evaluates the validity of allegations, and offers advice and recommendations to the Bishop. The Bishop will then determine the status of the priest.

What happens to a seminarian who is accused of sexually abusing a minor?

The Diocese reports allegations it receives regarding sexual abuse of minors to law enforcement, and is committed to cooperating with any investigations by law enforcement and civil authorities, in accordance with Massachusetts law. From a Diocesan perspective, the Core Advisory Group first conducts a preliminary investigation into the allegation. If the Core Advisory Group determines that the allegation is not manifestly false, they will advise the Bishop. A more fulsome investigation may then be conducted. While an

investigation is pending, the Diocesan's sponsorship of the seminarian as a candidate for the priesthood is suspended. The Bishop will then determine the status of the seminarian.

What happens to a layperson (including employees and volunteers) who is accused of sexually abusing a minor?

When an allegation is made against a lay employee or volunteer, the Director of Professional Standards and Oversight (the "Director") will be notified. Law enforcement and civil authorities are also notified. When appropriate, the Director will notify the Director of Human Resources, Pastor or other appropriate supervisor of the employee/volunteer (the "Manager") who will take appropriate steps. Unless the allegation is manifestly false, the layperson will be placed on administrative leave or terminated, according to the judgment of the Manager. The Manager must take other appropriate steps, in accordance with relevant policies and Massachusetts law. See 5.12 and 5.13 in the [Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful](#).

What happens if sexual abuse by a cleric is admitted or established?

In all circumstances, if sexual abuse is admitted or established, the cleric will be permanently dismissed, and applicable diocesan policy and canonical steps would be taken. See, for example, the [Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful](#).

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Contact Us

450 Highland Avenue
Fall River, MA 02720

Phone: 508-675-1311

E-mail: jkearns@dioc-fr.org



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