

Dear Friends in Christ,

Recent media reports regarding the reporting policies of both the Diocese of La Crosse and the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, prompt me to write to you today about the very serious issue of clergy sexual abuse of minors and the Church's response to victims/survivors.

I want you and all of the people in parishes and schools, as well as the greater community of southeastern Wisconsin, to understand clearly what happens when a report of sexual abuse of minors by a diocesan priest is received by the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Those who have been victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse are important to us and we continue to strive for healing and resolution with those who have been harmed.

In the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, I have a Community Advisory Board that includes individuals from outside the Church structure, with expertise in sexual abuse/assault to counsel me on policies and procedures related to clergy sexual abuse of minors. A list of members is available at this link. <http://www.archmil.org/offices/sexual-abuse-prevention/community-advisory-board.htm>) We have adopted high standards in working with victims/survivors and their families, and have worked collaboratively with other victim assistance agencies to do so. I take their input very seriously, as did my predecessor, Archbishop Timothy Dolan. I have already met with this Board and my plan is to continue to do so monthly throughout the year.

These policies are reviewed annually as part of the outside, independent audit under the U.S. Bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. I hope we can continue to build upon these standards and continue reaching out to all those who have been harmed in a sensitive, compassionate and pastoral manner to ensure, to the best of our ability, that we promote healing and resolution with the Church.

I want you to know specifically how we report sexual abuse/assault in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

- We require any staff member or volunteer, who knows or suspects that a minor (under the age of 18) is being sexually abused to report directly to the civil or criminal authorities. Each of you in a parish leadership position must be clear in your understanding of mandatory reporting responsibilities. The Archdiocese of Milwaukee follows the mandatory reporting laws established by the State of Wisconsin. The responsibilities are available at this link. <http://www.archmil.org/offices/sexual-abuse-prevention/mandatory-reporting.htm>
- When a person comes forward to the Archdiocese of Milwaukee with a report of sexual abuse/assault, and the abuse occurred when the person was a minor but the person is reporting as an adult, the case is automatically reported to civil authorities if the perpetrator is still alive. This has been the policy since 2003.
- When an adult comes forward to the Archdiocese of Milwaukee with a report of sexual abuse or misconduct that occurred when the person was an adult, they are encouraged to make a report to the civil authorities. In this case, it is our policy to defer to the wishes of the reporting adult as to whether to contact civil authorities. Amy Peterson, our Victim Assistance Coordinator tells me that this benchmark of deferring to the adult victim is the standard practice by social service, advocacy, and victim assistance agencies in the community.

In the current La Crosse case that you may have read about last week, involving an adult victim, the individual requested confidentiality and we deferred to the individual's request.

I, as the diocesan bishop, also want to know of any reports of abuse because of the commitments I have made under the U.S. Bishops' Charter, to hold perpetrators accountable, regardless of whether any criminal prosecution can occur.

For example, upon receiving an allegation against a previously unknown perpetrator, my priority is to remove the alleged perpetrator from ministry until a full investigation can be completed, especially when no criminal prosecution can occur. In the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, the investigation process was developed in 2002 through the work of an outside commission, chaired by the late Howard Eisenberg, who was Dean of the Marquette University School of Law, to ensure objectivity and fairness for both victim and accused. That investigative process is posted on the archdiocesan Web site.

<http://www.archmil.org/ArchMil/Resources/sexualabuserreportsflowchart.pdf>

To avoid any confusion, however, about what our policy was when I was Bishop of La Crosse, I have encouraged the diocesan administrator of La Crosse to clarify communications about child abuse reporting policies and post those on the diocesan Web site and in the diocesan newspaper. I have been informed that their Diocesan Child Sexual Abuse Review Board met today to review this suggestion and will subsequently make those clarifications in their communications.

I also want to be clear with all of you how pleased I have been to learn about the dedicated, pastoral, thoughtful and deliberate approach that has shaped the policies and practices within our archdiocese these past eight years in particular.

Our primary concerns as a Church and as a diocese, are to work with victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse of minors; to provide assistance toward healing and resolution; to hold perpetrators accountable by ensuring none ever serve in any public ministry; and to put in place policies and procedures that ensure that, to the best of our ability, nothing like this can ever happen again.

There is a prayer for healing on our archdiocesan Web site.

<http://www.archmil.org/offices/sexual-abuse-prevention/healing-prayer.htm> In closing, may I ask each of you to pray this prayer, asking God to help us in our outreach and service to victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Jerome E. ListECKI
Archbishop of Milwaukee