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PERRY COUNTY NEWS

Local clergyman accused of sexual misconduct

By Stuart Cassidy

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TELL CITY – A retired Franciscan monk who's had ties to Perry County through St. Meinrad Archabbey and St. Paul Catholic Church for the past 35 years has been implicated for sexual misconducts and officially suspended from the Franciscan order. The allegations of Fr. Thomas Richstatter didn't arise in Perry County, and reportedly occurred more than three decades ago when he served in Cincinnati, Ohio.



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Criminal charges against Richstatter reportedly will not be filed due to statute of limitations. Yet the Franciscan Friars of St. John the Baptist Province in Cincinnati found enough evidence to hold Richstatter accountable.

"The Province was made aware of an allegation of sexual abuse against Fr. Richstatter reported by a sole individual who was not a member of a parish or ministry where this friar served. The alleged abuse did not occur in connection with Fr. Richstatter's official or ministerial duties with the diocese or Franciscans," a written statement issued through the Franciscan Friars of St. John conveyed. "Upon learning of the allegation, SJBP implemented its policy and procedures for the protection of children and vulnerable adults. Although already living in retirement, Fr. Richstatter was immediately suspended from all priestly faculties and removed from all ministerial environments."

The Province has also notified the dioceses and communities where he served – including the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, St. Paul's Parish, and St. Meinrad Seminary.

"The Province has cooperated with law enforcement and has offered outside counseling to the individual who reported the allegation," The statement continued.

Anyone who may have experienced misconduct or abuse by this friar should contact Fr. Michael Chowning, OFM, at the SJBP Office for the Protection of Children, at (513) 721-4700, ext. 3214."

The Province went on to say, "SJBP has a zero tolerance policy for misconduct, abuse and any other type of unlawful behavior by friars and anyone employed by the Province. We take seriously all allegations of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults, whether the friar is active, retired or deceased – and whether it occurred within or outside (the latter being the case with Fr. Richstatter) ministerial environments and duties."

The statement concluded, "The Province is vigorous in its efforts to maintain safe environments and protect children and vulnerable adults – as evidenced by its adoption and implementation of the Standards for Accreditation of Praesidium, an independent agency that regularly monitors, assesses and validates the sexual abuse protection policies and procedures of public and private organizations. Additionally, the Province's efforts include compliance with the established standards of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops."