



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As a priest and now as a Bishop, I am deeply grateful to God for calling me to minister in his holy church. Priesthood to me and many others is a sacred and treasured gift. I have known and been inspired by many holy and good priests and Bishops during my 46 years of service.

Therefore, it is with a heavy and sad heart I acknowledge that some priests and Bishops have abused the grace and beauty of priesthood. They have sexually abused innocent children among us.

We are all aware of the abuse within the Catholic Church, which – though happening decades ago – ignored the true purpose and ministry of the priesthood. This has resulted in a wound to the Church, the body of Christ. Victims of abuse across the nation have courageously come forward, bringing accountability to priests and church officials who betrayed their positions as trusted leaders. Today, our diocese will reckon with part of its own shameful history by releasing the names of 28 priests credibly accused of the sexual abuse of minors.

For some, today's release will be an important milestone in their healing. For others, it may re-open deep wounds, reviving their disturbing memories or those of their loved ones. However, I believe the Lord compels us to shine a light on this darkness so we can heal together and send a clear message to victims: We believe you and care about you.

My colleagues and I at the diocese categorically condemn all cases of sexual abuse and misconduct. Sexual abuse is in direct conflict with our mission and the promises we make as priests. And, most importantly, it brings unspeakable and often lasting pain to those we are charged to protect and minister to. To all victims of such abuse, as well as the advocates and supporters of survivors, I am profoundly sorry for the suffering you have endured.

As abuse survivors and their advocates have pointed out, apologies are not enough. There is no remedy for our church's past failure to protect our members – especially our children, who are least able to defend themselves. But we are determined to demonstrate, through action, that we are committed to transparency, accountability and helping survivors heal. We encourage all victims of abuse or misconduct to contact civil authorities and then our victim assistance coordinator, use the resources available through our diocese and help bring offenders to justice.

A Diocesan Review Board, partnering with the diocese, created this report over the past several months. A group led by the diocese's law firm has also reviewed every priest's file we have dating from the beginning of the diocese in 1902. The board reviews all allegations reported to the diocese, ensuring there is no conflict of interest in investigating them. The board considered any objective information that was available, including consistency of the testimony of witnesses, accuracy of the details, such as the placement of the accused at the

time the allegation is said to have taken place and physical evidence. In addition, the board considered other corroborating evidence from files or other possible witnesses.

For this list, the board reviewed allegations of sexual misconduct by a member of the clergy against a minor, with the first credible allegations dating back to 1948 and the latest in 1995. There have been other allegations since that time, but none has been deemed credible by local authorities or the review board. The list originally contained 29 names; however, the diocese received notification that one of the priests has appealed to Rome, and therefore his information is being withheld pending resolution.

The priests named have not necessarily been charged or convicted in a civil or criminal case, but all cases have been referred to proper authorities. None on the list is currently involved in the ministry or work with any youth, nor will they be permitted to do so in the future. Twenty-two on the list are deceased, five live out of state, and one individual who left the priesthood still lives in Iowa.

The list could grow as other credible accusations against priests are made. If you, or someone you know, have been sexually abused by any priest or clergy member in our diocese, please call local authorities and contact our Victim Assistance Coordinator by calling 1-866-435-4397 or 712-279-5610.

Publishing this list is the beginning of a new chapter in the history of our diocese. We want it to usher in a climate of openness and transparency resulting in the protection of our youth and accountability for clergy and church leaders. As leaders in faith, we must do everything we can to atone for and help remedy our church's sins, but we are also committed to minimizing the chances of repeating them.

We already have a positive beginning. The diocese has implemented a number of reforms over the past two decades to protect youth in our parishes. These include:

- Immediately relaying every allegation of misconduct to law enforcement.
- Referring every allegation to the review board to ensure that reviews are conducted impartially.
- Requiring all volunteers and employees working with the diocese to undergo a comprehensive background check to ensure there is no history of misconduct or improper behavior. The diocese prohibits anyone with such a history from working with the church.
- Requiring all diocesan volunteers and employees to continually take the VIRTUS training which empowers everyone working in the diocese to be effective advocates for our youth.

Finally, I personally recognize the pain and trauma of survivors and, like many of you, feel anger and shame for the church I help lead here in Northwest Iowa. I thank the priests, deacons and religious working in the diocese who have been faithful servants, many of whom have been painted by the broad brush of scandal. And I ask for your prayers for victims and our church. May all of us find comfort in God's all-inclusive love.

May we move forward in hope and unity, counting on the assistance of Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and Saint Joseph, her most chaste spouse.

Your Brother In Christ,



Most Reverend R. Walker Nickless
Bishop of Sioux City