



Diocese of Springfield

Office of the Bishop

May 24, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

Since my arrival in the Diocese of Springfield, I have been committed to transparency and communication particularly with regard to the scandal of the sexual abuse of minors by clergy, religious and lay church staff. It is an open wound that has remained for far too long.

Today I am writing to address these painful sins and crimes that have broken countless hearts, shattered lives and have cast a dark shadow over our Church.

In recent months I have met with many survivors and family members. I have heard from these courageous individuals that the way the diocese responded to their reports of abuse was re-traumatizing and re-victimizing. As your bishop, please accept my sincere apology and my commitment towards working to regain your trust. I am fully committed to doing all that I can to change the culture of the diocese.

With that in mind, I am announcing a significant development in our commitment to transparency and accountability here in the Diocese of Springfield. The diocese is expanding its criteria for disclosure of all those with a finding of credibility of sexual abuse of a minor while serving in the diocese.

An allegation is deemed to be credible if there is reasonable cause to believe that the sexual abuse occurred. It is most similar to a grand jury indictment in our legal system. While it is not a definitive finding of guilt, the public acknowledgement of those credible allegations is a critically important action that the diocese owes to those survivors who have so courageously stepped forward.

The new list will now include posthumous allegations deemed to be credible by either the Diocesan Review Board or its predecessor, the Misconduct Commission. An updated version of the disclosure document will be posted to diospringfield.org in early June.

This will result in a considerable addition to the list which previously appeared on our diocesan web site. Many of these credible allegations were previously excluded from our list because the accused was deceased when the allegation surfaced, was a member of a religious order, or were lay employees of the diocese.

It is important to note that these are not new allegations. Rather these findings date back many years.

Prior to this release, the Office of Safe Environment and Victim Assistance conducted a thorough review of all cases to assure we were applying the same standard for names now being listed. To ensure that the process was rigorous and consistent, an independent review was conducted by Dr. Raina Lamande, a forensic psychologist, faculty member and researcher from the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth. Going forward, the names of additional individuals found to have credible claims of sexual abuse of minors will be added to the list, based on new information or a new evaluation by the Diocesan Review Board.

The expanded disclosure policy is only one element of our response to receiving an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor. Currently, all allegations are immediately reported to law enforcement and we cooperate fully in their investigations.

I encourage anyone who has been the victim of sexual abuse by clergy or any personnel of the diocese, to report this directly to law enforcement as well as to the Office of Safe Environment and Victim Assistance at (413) 452-0624, through our confidential toll-free number (800) 842-9055, or by email to reportabuse@diospringfield.org.

It is my belief that this expanded disclosure of names is a necessary action as part of fulfilling my commitment of transparency and healing. We owe this to the courageous survivors and their loved ones who have suffered the unimaginable pain of sexual abuse. We owe this to our Catholic community left devastated and disillusioned by this scourge. We owe this also to the many faithful priests who serve with great devotion.

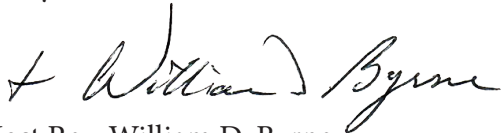
As a Church, both locally and universally, too many times in the past we have failed to protect the innocence and dignity of minors from those who committed these heinous crimes. We can never erase the harm done, however, acknowledging a survivor's allegations to be credible brings the truth of their horrific experience into the light. I offer my most sincere apology to all who have suffered from the abuse and to their loved ones. I am truly sorry.

My commitment to assuring that the Catholic Church here in western Massachusetts is employing the best practices possible in receiving, evaluating allegations, and employing pastoral care to any person abused in this diocese is absolute. As we make this expanded disclosure announcement, I expect more changes in our systems will be identified and recommended by the Independent Task Force on the Response to Sexual Abuse within the Diocese of Springfield.

As we make ongoing changes to our policies and procedures, we also need to engage spiritually to cast out this evil. I invite you to join me for a Holy Hour for all whose lives have been impacted by the abuse crisis on Thursday, June 3 at 7pm at St. Michael's Cathedral. I also strongly encourage all parishes to hold similar devotional services.

I pray fervently first and foremost for all survivors of sexual abuse, living and deceased, whose burden no person should ever have to bear. I also ask for God's forgiveness of our Church's past failures and that God will guide us in our continued resolve to effect the actions necessary for healing and the determination to bring about meaningful and sustainable change.

I am your Friend in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William D. Byrne". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Rev. William D. Byrne
Bishop of Springfield