

Cleveland Diocese statement

From Catholic Diocese of Cleveland on Oct. 14, 2024:

"Catholic Diocese of Cleveland's statement in response to pending WEWS report

The Catholic Diocese of Cleveland and Bishop Malesic have a strong and demonstrable commitment to child safety and to responsible transparency, which consists of publishing the name of any diocesan cleric against whom a substantiated allegation of child sexual abuse has been made and permanently barring them from ministry. Bishop Malesic has made it clear through both words and actions that he will not allow anyone to work or volunteer for the diocese or any parish of the diocese if they have been convicted of a sex crime or if there has been made against them a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse. The diocese also reports all allegations of child sexual abuse to civil authorities/law enforcement. The diocese would be happy to say more, however, despite a request from the diocese, WEWS and Jonathan Walsh refused to provide the diocese with specific questions or criticisms to which it could respond, instead providing only a general idea of what the story would cover. Regardless, those wishing to learn more about the protection of children in the diocese can visit: <https://www.dioceseofcleveland.org/offices/parish-life/child-protection/frequently-asked-questions>.

Background information on general subjects we believe will be covered in the report:

Keith Kozak participating in music ministry at St. Thomas More Parish

Upon learning that Keith Kozak – a registered sex offender – had been permitted to participate as a volunteer in the parish's music ministry, Bishop Malesic took immediate action and made it clear to the pastor that no person convicted of a sex offense could be employed or volunteer in any capacity. He further ensured that substantial limitations were in place to regulate Mr. Kozak's access to parish property. These limitations included prohibiting his presence on parish property except when accompanied at all times by a chaperone approved by the parish and prohibiting him from interacting in any way with children when on the parish campus. In addition, after completing an investigation into the matter, Bishop Malesic asked for and received the resignation of the pastor.

Lawsuit in Greensburg that named then Bishop Malesic

Bishop Malesic became the bishop of the Diocese of Greensburg nearly two decades after the alleged abuse by Fr. Joseph Sredzinski. During the time of the alleged abuse, Bishop Malesic was a priest of the Diocese of Harrisburg and was not appointed Bishop of Greensburg until 2015. He has never once concealed or conspired to conceal the sexual abuse of any person. Despite this, and despite the fact that Bishop Malesic had only a few brief interactions with Fr. Sredzinski after arriving in Greensburg (Sredzinski died in Poland four months after Bishop Malesic became Bishop of the Diocese of Greensburg), Bishop Malesic was nonetheless and without basis named as a party to a civil lawsuit related to Fr. Sredzinski. In response, the Diocese of Greensburg filed a motion to dismiss Bishop Malesic as a defendant in the lawsuit. The lawsuit was subsequently settled out of court without any verdict being reached about the merits of the case. When Bishop Malesic directed that the Diocese of Greensburg publish a list of clerics who had substantiated allegations of child sexual abuse made against them in August of 2018, Fr. Sredzinski's name was included in that list.

Robert McWilliams

Neither the diocese nor anyone else who knew Robert McWilliams had any reason to believe he was capable of committing the heinous crimes he committed against children. Like all seminarians, he was thoroughly vetted and screened prior to admission. That screening process included, among other things, a criminal background check and psychological testing by mental health professionals (including evaluations of a candidate's sexual and family history). At no time before or after his ordination was there any red flag or other indication that McWilliams was a threat to anyone. Not even the best policies, protocols, and efforts can guarantee that a person intent on committing evil will be identified and stopped before committing that evil. McWilliams was able to commit his vile acts because he was a master of deception, not because anyone failed to notice something they should have noticed.

Transparency

The Catholic Diocese of Cleveland first started publishing the names of diocesan clerics removed from ministry because of allegations of child sexual abuse in 2002. In that same year, the diocese also cooperated fully with the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office in its grand jury investigation of clerical sex abuse, giving the prosecutor's office access to any files it desired to see. In 2019 the diocese expanded on its efforts to publish the name of

clerics by compiling those names previously published in 2002 in a list format along with the names of any diocesan cleric against whom a substantiated allegation of child sex abuse was made at any time throughout the history of the diocese.

Groups such as SNAP and Bishop Accountability have accused the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland and its bishops of lacking transparency because, they claim, the Diocese has not published the names of all clerics who have been accused of child sexual abuse. The Diocese believes that justice must be served both in what it publishes and what it does not publish. While it is a matter of justice to publish the names of individuals against whom substantiated allegations of child sexual abuse have been made, it is also a matter of justice to refrain from publishing the names of clerics if the allegations against them cannot be substantiated. To handle such matters differently would be irresponsible and unfair."