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Missouri Bishop McKnight: Sexual abuse of children is a crime and a sin

AUGUST 27, 2018 BY [BRIAN HAUSWIRTH](#)

The Bishop of the Diocese of Jefferson City says Missouri's Attorney General has called to express his gratitude for the bishop's request that the AG's office review diocese files about clergy abuse.

Bishop Shawn McKnight, who was appointed by Pope Francis in November, briefed reporters Friday afternoon in Jefferson City and discussed the Pennsylvania grand jury report.

McKnight is critical of previous Roman Catholic church leaders.

"Their active cover-up or passive silence when clergy abusers were continued in the ministry or promoted in office gravely compromised the credibility of the hierarchy, and by extension, the whole Church," McKnight says.

Bishop McKnight says they have no clergy in active ministry in the Diocese of Jefferson City with violations of the charter for protecting children and young people.

He says Pope Francis and every bishop must address the clergy abuse issue immediately.

Bishop McKnight tells reporters the "clergy sex abuse crisis is plaguing our church", and he describes it as a "moral catastrophe."

"A Mass of healing will be scheduled to express our sorrow for the sins of sexual abuse and the abuse of power by clergy, as well as for the healing of all those affected by this scandal," says McKnight.



**Diocese of Jefferson City
Bishop Shawn McKnight
briefs reporters in
Jefferson City on August
24, 2018 (Brian Hauswirth
photo)**

McKnight tells MissouriNet the Mass of healing will take place this fall, adding that officials have not set a time or location yet.

He's urging anyone who knows of clergy who have abused to come forward to make a complaint.

Bishop McKnight also says one of the priests named in the Pennsylvania grand jury report has ties to mid-Missouri.

McKnight tells reporters that Fr. John Pender, who died in 2009, was assigned to the parishes of St. Robert and St. Cornelius in mid-Missouri's Crocker in the 1970s and 1980s.

"We are just simply wanting to reach out, out of an abundance of caution," McKnight says. "We have no indication that there has been the sexual abuse of minors in our diocese by Fr. Pender, but just to be sure, we are about, and as a church, it is part of our mission to help those who are in need."

McKnight is asking anyone with information about Fr. Pender to call (573) 694-3199.

The Pennsylvania grand jury report says that more than 300 priests in that state sexually abused children for seven decades.

Bishop McKnight describes sexual abuse of children as "a crime and a sin," adding that the Diocese of Jefferson City has no tolerance for those who intentionally harm children.

The Diocese of Jefferson City covers 38 counties in mid-Missouri, as well as northern and northeast Missouri. It includes Jefferson City, Columbia, Lake of the Ozarks, Sedalia, Moberly, Mexico and Hannibal.

There are 95 parishes in the diocese, along with three high schools and 37 elementary schools.

The Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph and the Archdiocese of St. Louis are also voluntarily letting Hawley's office review their files.

The Springfield News-Leader reports the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau is launching its own independent inquiry going back more than five decades.

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Missouri Attorney General Josh Hawley's office will review church files about clergy abuse (April 2018 file photo courtesy of Missouri Attorney General Josh Hawley's office)

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