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Late Brebeuf President Patrick Sheehy accused of abusing a minor in 1978

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School leaders at Brebeuf Jesuit announced Friday allegations of abuse against the school's former president, the late Brother Patrick Sheehy.

In a letter to the school community, the school's current president, Fr. Bill Verbryke said the school was alerted by the Midwest Province of the Society of Jesus in February 2020 of allegations of abuse against Sheehy. The alleged abuse took place in 1978, according to the letter.

A subsequent investigation found that the allegations were "established," which means there is a "reasonable certainty that the sexual abuse of a minor occurred," according to the Society's website. Sheehy has been added to the Province's public list of Jesuits with established accusations of abuse.

The abuse did not occur while Sheehy was employed at Brebeuf, according to school spokesperson Michael Higginbotham, though Sheehy was part of a Jesuit community with their residence in Indianapolis at the time. Sheehy was president of the school from 1987 until his death in 1992.

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"As is often the case, and for a variety of reasons, allegations of abuse can be made decades after the abuse occurred," Verbryke wrote. "No matter when an allegation is made, it is taken very seriously by Brebeuf Jesuit, the Midwest Province, and the Church itself."

IndyStar has reached out to the Midwest Jesuits for additional information.

In his letter to parents, Verbryke acknowledged "the bravery demonstrated by the victim of this abuse and continue to hold this person in our prayers."

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Those who have been the victim of sexual abuse or harassment by Sheehy or another member of the clergy are encouraged to contact law enforcement to report the crime as well as church officials.

Verbryke can be reached at 317-524-7128 or via email at president@brebeuf.org. Reports can also be submitted to Marjorie O’Dea, director of the office of safe environment for Midwest Jesuits at 779-975-6363 or via mail at 1010 N. Hooker Street, Chicago, IL 60642.

The Jesuits are a Roman Catholic order of priests established by St. Ignatius Loyola in 1540. As they are a separate religious order, they are not governed by the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. In the case of a Catholic school, the archbishop does have some oversight — demonstrated by Archbishop Charles Thompson's 2019 decree admonishing Brebeuf for refusing to fire a gay teacher.

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