

## **News Release**

The Archdiocese of Chicago, and the Dioceses of Belleville, Joliet, Peoria, Rockford, and Springfield  
May 18, 2023

For Immediate Release

### **Illinois Catholic Dioceses Publish a Summary of their Processes for Handling Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors Against Clerics**

All Catholic dioceses in Illinois today issued a summary (attached) of their common processes for handling allegations of sexual abuse of minors against any Catholic cleric who is ministering or has ministered within their respective boundaries. The Catholic Church in the United States instituted these and similar processes in response to a growing understanding that, over its history, Church clerics and other personnel had sexually abused children in their care and that the response to these crimes had been inadequate. While most of the processes described in the attached have been in place for many years, Illinois dioceses may have described or applied them in different ways.

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, dioceses began developing policies and procedures for dealing with clergy sexual abuse of minors. Still, the independent governance of dioceses and the protective attitudes among leadership proved to be barriers to widespread adoption of meaningful reforms. In 2002, a media expose triggered a public scandal in the Archdiocese of Boston and provided the impetus for a uniform national approach. That year, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) adopted its Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (the Charter), based on policies adopted in 1992 in Chicago, that set forth procedures for handling allegations of sexual abuse of minors and the healing of survivors.

The Charter sets forth principles and standards for handling allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy, and each Illinois diocese has continually improved its policies to conform to national standards and as a result of its experiences. The Church's approach to clerical misconduct, including the Charter, has been updated over the past 20 years. All Illinois dioceses are in full compliance with the Charter adopted in 2002 and continually revised in 2005, 2011 and 2018 by the USCCB.

In addition, the global Church has continued to evolve the way it deals with clergy sexual abuse of minors, particularly in enforcing a uniform approach. In 2019, Pope Francis issued the decree entitled *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, mandating a world-wide system for the reporting, investigating and adjudicating of allegations against bishops, both of participating in an act of abuse, and of failing to respond appropriately

to allegations of abuse by another cleric. Soon thereafter, the USCCB adopted *Directives for the Implementation of the Provisions of Vos Estis Lux Mundi Concerning Bishops and Their Equivalents*, establishing a system for the reporting and investigation of such allegations within the United States. Under this system, the “metropolitan archbishop” of a region coordinates this process with lay investigators unless he is the subject of the allegation, in which case, the senior suffragan bishop by promotion in that region conducts the investigation. The Archbishop of Chicago is the metropolitan archbishop for the “Chicago Province,” which includes all six Illinois dioceses. The current senior suffragan bishop of this province is Most Rev. Thomas John Paprocki of Springfield.

Over the past four years, the Illinois dioceses have worked with the Office of the Illinois Attorney General to improve the transparency and effectiveness of their policies. Prompted by the Attorney General’s investigation, the dioceses have critically reviewed current policies and implemented certain recommended changes to their existing reporting to the public to further increase transparency.

“The Catholic Church in Illinois has been at the forefront of dealing with sexual abuse of minors for many years,” said Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago and Metropolitan of the Chicago Province. “In 1992, the Archdiocese of Chicago, led by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, formulated and adopted policies for handling allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy including, for the first time, a lay review board. Cardinal Bernardin presented the Chicago policies to the USCCB meeting in 1993. These policies formed the basis of the USCCB 2002 Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.”

Cardinal Cupich continued, “At this time, working with the Office of the Attorney General of Illinois, the leaders of all six Illinois dioceses endeavored to make clear and update our approach, mindful of our lived experience and best practices in this field. Our common goals in doing so are to ensure we offer pastoral support to those affected by this tragedy and to work diligently to prevent it from occurring again.”

The Illinois dioceses’ procedures include, among other things:

- The diocesan website publication of the names of its clerics credibly accused of sexual abuse of minors,
- Policies for handling allegations of sexual abuse of minors against clerics incardinated in their dioceses,
- Diocesan policies for handling such allegations against deceased, laicized and religious order priests, and

- Processes for dealing with allegations that arise during criminal investigations or civil lawsuits.

It is important to note that, for many years, the Illinois dioceses have:

- Acted promptly upon receipt of an allegation of sexual abuse of minors,
- Reported all such allegations to civil authorities,
- Established victim assistance ministries,
- Established special offices to handle allegations of sexual abuse of minors,
- Created independent, lay-majority review boards that advise the bishop and review the bishop's decisions related to allegations of sexual abuse of minors, and
- Conducted robust safe-environment abuse-prevention programs.

By issuing this joint public statement, the Illinois dioceses hope to enhance the public's understanding of how they handle allegations of sexual abuse of minors. As always, the safety and protection of children, and the fair and compassionate treatment of those who report abuse, will remain paramount factors in our actions. The bishops of the Illinois dioceses stand ready to collaborate with all agencies and organizations in Illinois that care for and educate children in establishing effective policies and practices for child safety, confident we can learn from each other.

The Illinois Catholic dioceses - Belleville, Chicago, Joliet, Peoria, Rockford, and Springfield - serve 3.4 million Catholics, comprising approximately 27 percent of the total state population, through more than 900 parishes. All dioceses act immediately upon receipt of an allegation of sexual abuse of minors.

For more information on the Illinois dioceses, this press release, or the sexual abuse of minors policies each diocese follows, please consult the web sites of the dioceses. The web addresses are: Diocese of Belleville <https://www.diobelle.org/>; Archdiocese of Chicago <https://www.archchicago.org/>; Diocese of Joliet <https://www.dioceseofjoliet.org/>; Diocese of Peoria <https://www.cdop.org/>; Diocese of Rockford <https://www.rockforddiocese.org/>; and Diocese of Springfield <https://www.dio.org/>.

## **Summary of the Roman Catholic Dioceses of Illinois Practices for Handling of Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors Against Clerics**

Below is a general summary of the processes followed by each of the six Illinois Catholic dioceses for handling allegations of sexual abuse of minors against clerics. Each diocese is led by its own bishop and has adopted its own policies and procedures for their implementation but, as shown below, they all focus on the safety of children and compassionate outreach to survivors of sexual abuse of minors.

### **1. Website Summary of Policies**

- Each diocese publishes a summary of the policies it follows in receiving, investigating, and making determinations about allegations of sexual abuse of minors asserted against a diocesan cleric.
- The policy summary is posted and maintained on each diocese's website page dedicated to child protection matters.
  - Belleville: <https://www.diobelle.org/education/child-protection/policy>;
  - Chicago: <https://protect.archchicago.org/making-a-report/the-cair-process-of-reporting>;
  - Joliet: <https://www.diojoliet.org/web/child-protection/reporting-abuse-in-the-diocese-of-joliet>;
  - Peoria: <https://cdop.org/safe-environment-program/>;
  - Rockford: <https://www.rockforddiocese.org/safe-environment/report-abuse/>;
  - Springfield: <https://dio.org/office-for-safe-environment/make-a-report/>

### **2. All Complainants Are Treated Equally and Compassionately**

- Anyone reporting an incident of abuse is treated with respect and compassion. They are encouraged to articulate their allegation in as much detail as they are able.
- Anyone reporting an incident of abuse is offered the services of the diocese's victim assistance ministry.
- All allegations of sexual abuse of a minor are reported to civil authorities.
- All allegations of sexual abuse of minors against diocesan clergy are investigated and assessed fairly and responsibly, without regard to the identity or individual characteristics of the person making the complaint.

### **3. Resigned, Laicized, and Deceased Diocesan Clergy**

- Abuse allegations against a diocesan cleric who has died or has resigned from ministry or been laicized are handled as much as possible in the same manner as allegations against a cleric in active ministry. The same intake procedures are followed, the same offers of pastoral care are made to the person making the allegation and, to the extent possible, the same investigative steps are taken.
- As it does with priests in active ministry, the diocese reports all allegations of sexual abuse of minors against deceased, resigned and laicized diocesan clergy to civil authorities. If the cleric has not been previously determined to have engaged in the sexual abuse of a minor or minors, the

results of the investigation will be presented to the diocese's review board, which will determine, to the extent possible, whether there is reasonable cause to believe the allegation is true.

- If an allegation against a resigned, laicized, or deceased cleric is substantiated, the diocese will publicly announce such action on its website.

#### **4. Religious Order and Extern Clergy**

- Members of religious orders, and clergy who have been incardinated in a different diocese (“extern clergy”), may at times be assigned to minister within one of the Illinois dioceses.
- While such religious order and extern clergy remain at all times subject to the authority and supervision of the religious order or the “originating” diocese where they were incardinated, the Illinois diocese in which they are ministering handles allegations of sexual abuse of minors against such clergy as follows:
- If the accused religious order or extern cleric is ministering or has ministered within the diocese, receipt of the allegation will be reported to civil authorities, documented by the diocese and forwarded to the cleric’s religious order or originating diocese for investigation and determination.

If, at the time an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor is received, the accused cleric is assigned to a diocesan ministry, the diocese will immediately assess the potential risk to children. If such a risk exists, the diocese will withdraw the cleric from public ministry and remove his faculties for the safety of minors. If the cleric is ministering within the diocese but not pursuant to a diocesan assignment, the diocese will again immediately assess the potential risk to children. If such a risk exists, the diocese will withdraw his faculties for ministry within the diocese. In either case, the diocese will publicly announce the withdrawal of the cleric’s faculties.

- After the diocese has forwarded an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor to the accused cleric’s religious order or originating diocese for investigation, the diocese will follow up to determine the outcome of such investigation: namely, whether or not the religious order or originating diocese has substantiated the allegation, and the status of the cleric at the conclusion of the inquiry.
- The Illinois dioceses all post the names of religious order clerics or extern clerics on their respective web lists of clerics against whom there are substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of a minor when (1) they are notified that an allegation has been substantiated by the religious order or originating diocese and (2) the cleric has a sufficient connection with the diocese, as provided for in that diocese’s policies.
  - Belleville: <https://www.diobelle.org/education/child-protection>;
  - Chicago: <https://protect.archchicago.org/>;
  - Joliet: <https://www.diojoliet.org/web/child-protection/reporting-abuse-in-the-diocese-of-joliet>;
  - Peoria: <https://cdop.org/safe-environment-program/>;
  - Rockford: <https://www.rockforddiocese.org/safe-environment/>;
  - Springfield: <https://dio.org/promise/>

#### **5. Criminal Investigations**

- If a diocese learns one of its clerics is the subject of a criminal investigation for sexual abuse of minors, the diocese will work with the local authorities to assess the risk posed to children. If such a risk exists, the cleric at issue will be withdrawn from public ministry pending completion of the investigation for the safety of minors. Further, the complainant (if known) will be offered the

services of the victim assistance ministry, including pastoral care. The diocese will also publicly announce the cleric's withdrawal from ministry.

- The diocese will cooperate fully with the criminal investigation and will defer its own investigation of the allegation until the criminal investigation has concluded. This will ensure the diocesan investigation does not interfere with the criminal investigation and does not generate needless confusion.
- If a diocesan cleric pleads or is found guilty of criminal sexual abuse of minors, the cleric will be permanently removed from ministry for the safety of minors.
- If a diocesan cleric is acquitted of criminal sexual abuse of minors or the civil authorities advise they have ended their investigation and no criminal charges will be brought, the diocese will then initiate its own investigation. Such investigations will follow the same process and procedures as any other allegation of sexual abuse of minors. If the diocesan investigation concludes that the allegation is not substantiated, every effort will be made to restore the cleric's reputation as he returns to ministry.

## **6. Civil Lawsuits**

- If a diocesan cleric is named as the alleged perpetrator of sexual abuse of minors in a civil lawsuit, the diocese immediately assesses the potential risk to children. If such a risk exists, the diocese withdraws the cleric from public ministry for the safety of minors, pending a determination of whether there is reasonable cause to believe the allegation is true. The diocese also publicly announces the cleric's withdrawal from ministry.
- The diocese offers the complainant the services of the victim assistance ministry, including pastoral care.
- The diocese reports allegations of sexual abuse of minors made in a civil lawsuit to the civil authorities.
- The diocese investigates allegations of the sexual abuse of minors asserted in civil lawsuits in the same manner as other such allegations and considers information obtained in the litigation. The diocese may defer its investigative process until the litigation has concluded.

## **7. Inquiries Regarding Other Allegations of Abuse**

- If a reported victim of sexual abuse of a minor requests information about other possible abuse allegations against an accused cleric, the diocese will confirm whether other substantiated allegations have been made against that cleric.
- As a matter of fundamental fairness, the diocese does not discuss or disclose allegations of alleged clerical abuse that have not been substantiated.

## **8. Allegations Against Bishops**

- In 2019, Pope Francis promulgated the *motu proprio* (i.e., decree) *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, requiring the Catholic Church in every country to establish a system for the receipt and investigation of allegations against bishops (and other hierarchs) of sexual abuse of minors and of failure to respond

appropriately to such allegations of by other clerics. (See [Apostolic Letter in the form of “Motu Proprio” of the Supreme Pontiff Francis “Vos Estis Lux Mundi” \(7 May 2019\) | Francis \(vatican.va\)](#))

- Also in 2019, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued *Directives for the Implementation of the Provisions of Vos Estis Lux Mundi Concerning Bishops and Their Equivalent (the Directives)* creating in the United States a system for reporting and investigating allegations of sexual abuse of minors against bishops and, ultimately, their adjudication by the Holy See (the Vatican). (See <https://reportbishopabuse.org>)
- Allegations against bishops can be reported to the USCCB National Hotline or to any Illinois diocese for investigation and adjudication pursuant to the Papal Decree, *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* and the *Directives* adopted by the USCCB.
- The response to allegations is coordinated by the “metropolitan archbishop” of a region, which is called a “province.” The dioceses of Illinois constitute the Province of Chicago, and the metropolitan archbishop is the Archbishop of Chicago. The metropolitan archbishop’s coordination of the investigation includes reporting the allegation to the Holy See and, in cooperation with the Holy See, conducting the local investigation. Ultimately, based on the investigation, the Holy See, which has direct jurisdiction over all bishops, makes the final determination on the allegation. At the direction of the Holy See, the metropolitan archbishop takes any steps needed to ensure the safety of children while the allegation is being investigated. If the allegation is against the metropolitan archbishop, the senior suffragan bishop by promotion conducts the investigation. The current senior suffragan bishop by promotion in the Province of Chicago is Most Rev. Thomas John Paprocki of Springfield.