

By Bishop David Ricken | Catholic News Service
November 7, 2018

This is part four of Bishop David Ricken's responses to questions he received when he held listening sessions about the sexual abuse crisis in the church. You can find parts [one](#), [two](#), and [three](#) in recent issues of The Compass or online at www.thecompassnews.org.

We are tired of hearing words, we want action! What are you going to do about this? What will be different so this doesn't happen again?

I hear your frustration! I want to make sure this never happens again, too.

That's why in early September I outlined our action steps for accountability. This was my promise to the people of this diocese that we would take action to address this problem. We are making progress in this regard and I want to share some updates.

- I promised that I would listen to you, both through planned listening sessions in the parishes, but also by reading your letters and correspondence. We held seven listening sessions in September and early October, and over the past four weeks in The Compass, I have done my best to address the questions and suggestions that have come forward, including this question.
- We have opened our clergy files for review, not only by our Independent Review Board, but by an outside firm, Defenbaugh and Associates, Inc. The leader of this review has over 33 years of experience with the FBI. This review will be concluded in the coming weeks and we will follow up with a report on the findings of the review.
- We continue to encourage people to come forward if they are aware of abuse that is occurring at the hands of clergy or other employees of the church. We regularly provide contact information for people who wish to report abuse. In particular, we shared this contact information at our listening sessions as well as in this Compass series the past few weeks.
- I have asked leadership at Catholic Charities to invite experts to our diocese who can provide further training in trauma recovery to therapists, social workers, school counselors and pastoral care ministers. The purpose of this training is to continue to increase our community's understanding of this very important issue and enhance our efforts in accompanying victims of sexual abuse in their journey towards healing.

While we are making progress on these action steps and are doing our best to learn the new lessons from the current cases of sexual abuse in the news, we still remain committed to the policies in place as a result of the passage of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People in 2002. Key actions that directly resulted from the Charter include:

- We are committed to full transparency with all allegations of clergy sexual abuse of a minor.
- All first-person allegations of sexual abuse by any representative of the church are reported to the appropriate civil authorities.
- We cooperate fully with civil authorities in any investigation they deem necessary.
- We immediately remove from public ministry anyone in the church accused of sexual abuse of a minor, pending the results of any criminal and/or internal investigation.
- The positions of Victim Assistance coordinator and Safe Environment coordinator were established and staffed to ensure resources would be available to receive allegations of sexual abuse of a minor by anyone in the church, and to accompany victims on their own path towards physical, emotional and spiritual healing.
- All clergy, lay employees and volunteers who work with children or individuals at risk must submit to an initial criminal background check; the background check is refreshed every four years.
- All clergy, lay employees and volunteers who work with children or individuals at risk must attend Safe Environment Awareness education.
- All children in our Catholic schools and faith formation programs receive age-appropriate Safe Environment Awareness education to enable them to better protect themselves. This training also teaches students how to share any concerns that they may have that someone may want to abuse them.

- We have an Independent Review Board consisting mainly of laypersons with professional experience in health care, counseling, law, and law enforcement. They provide me counsel and guidance concerning investigations of clergy abuse allegations and enforcing our sexual misconduct policies.

Why is the external review only looking into priests/deacons? Why not lay ministers? Does the diocese have any record of lay ministers being accused of abuse?

What prompted the outside review were the recent accounts of clergy sexual abuse that stemmed from the grand jury report from Pennsylvania's two-year investigation. Since this report looked specifically at clergy, our review does likewise. We do not have plans at this time to review lay ministers.

Having said that, the question about abuse by lay ministers is a fair one, so I want to address it. There are currently no known lay ministers in the Diocese of Green Bay who have abused minors. As I mentioned with respect to clergy in part three last week, the only way we can address abuse is if we know about it. So if you are aware of lay ministers who have or are abusing others, we want you to report the abuse to civil authorities and to the diocese.

I can further assure you that we would take allegations of abuse committed by a layperson just as seriously as we do allegations of abuse committed by clergy. Our policies are the same in both cases, which I have already outlined.

When will women be allowed a role in leadership in the church? It's time for women priests.

While women are already in many leadership roles in the church, it is not possible for them to be ordained as priests. The ordination of men as priests is deeply rooted in the example of Jesus who chose 12 men as his first apostles. In their role as priests, men fulfill the role of Christ as bridegroom in service to his bride, the church. Following the example of our Savior, the church has imitated Christ in only ordaining men as priests.

Yet women have a role in the leadership in the church. All Christians are called to holiness, to lovingly follow Jesus as his disciples, and to share the Good News of salvation with the world. Today, as the role of women has expanded in our society, so has their role expanded in the leadership of the church.

Dedicated and faithful women comprise the majority of members of parish and school staffs and also fulfill many of the leadership roles at the diocesan offices. Women also serve critical roles on various boards and councils within the diocese, including our Diocesan Pastoral Council, Independent Review Board and Catholic Foundation board, among many others. The experience, commitment and wisdom that these women bring to our church has blessed the Diocese of Green Bay in countless ways.

Despite the greater presence of women in these leadership roles, I think we need to continue to identify ways to ensure that women's voices are never marginalized in the church. As long as some women feel ignored by church leaders, the Body of Christ will not be healthy. As your bishop, I am committed to ensuring that the voices of all the faithful are welcomed and affirmed.

I want to again thank you for the questions you have posed. I have done my best to answer them clearly and I hope my responses have been of some help to you. I have taken all your questions and suggestions to heart, and I will be sharing with my brother bishops what I have learned from you when we gather for our annual meetings next week. In addition, I will continue to provide updates to you on the steps we are taking to protect all people in the Diocese of Green Bay.

I continue to ask for your prayers, first and foremost, for all who have suffered as a result of clergy sex abuse. Please also pray for me, as I continue to discern how the Holy Spirit is calling me to promote healing for all people of the Diocese of Green Bay. I thank you for your prayers and will hold each of you in my prayers as well!