

## **Listening Sessions: Responding to Questions, part two**

By Bishop David Ricken  
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This is part two of Bishop David Ricken's responses to questions he received when he held listening sessions about the sexual abuse crisis in the church.

### **How prevalent is this in our diocese? Are there priests still in ministry who have abused?**

The Diocese of Green Bay has taken allegations of abuse very seriously. Because of this, there are currently no priests in ministry in the Diocese of Green Bay who are known to have abused minors.

### **Walk us through the process followed when you receive an allegation of clergy sex abuse.**

With every allegation, we want to make sure that civil authorities are notified. For this reason, we request that anyone with information about possible sexual abuse of a minor first call civil authorities and then call the diocese. (The numbers to call to report abuse on the diocesan website under the [Protecting Our Children](#) tab.)

We respond promptly and seriously to every complaint of sexual misconduct. If the allegation involves current abuse of a minor, we are required by law to share that information with the civil authorities, if we have been given sufficient information to make that report. We inform the caller that we will fulfill these requirements. If we are not given enough information to make the report, for instance, the caller does not share or does not know the location of the abuse or name of the abuser, we make an internal report to document the information we do have. In either case, we direct the caller to contact the police with the information they have.

If the allegation involves abuse from decades ago, and the victim is now an adult, we assess all the facts and provide support to the victim through the Diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator. We also notify the caller that we will be contacting the district attorney of the county in which the abuse is alleged to have occurred.

When the allegation is received and shared with civil authorities, we cooperate with them in any investigation they deem necessary. Additionally, we remove the person accused from ministry until a more thorough investigation is completed.

An important part of this process is the support we provide to the person making the allegation. Our Victim Assistance Coordinator is responsible for providing assistance to anyone who reports that he or she has been abused. This support includes pastoral assistance and counseling that may be needed to assist the person along the path of physical, emotional and spiritual healing. In addition, the Victim Assistance Coordinator serves as an advocate for the victim through the entire process. All support provided by the Victim Assistance Coordinator is at the victim's discretion.

If the allegation leads to criminal charges, the diocese cooperates fully with the civil authorities through that process. If found guilty, the person who sexually abused is subject to any criminal or civil penalties that may apply to the situation.

In addition to civil penalties, there are consequences within the church for a member of clergy found to have a credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor. Even if no civil penalties result from the allegation, perhaps because the statute of limitations has passed, if the allegation is credible, clergy are subject to penalties from the church. In part 3 of this series, I will provide more detail on these penalties.

Finally, part of our process when an allegation has been made and a priest is removed, is to work closely with the community affected by the abuse to help them experience healing and to encourage any other person who may have been victimized by this perpetrator to come forward.

### **What about the religious orders? Does the diocese investigate them?**

Unlike diocesan priests who are directly accountable to the bishop, priests who are part of religious orders, such as the Norbertines or Franciscans, are accountable to their religious superior within the order. Thus, anytime the Diocese of Green Bay receives a credible allegation against a priest who is part of a religious order, we encourage the person to contact law enforcement authorities. Additionally, this information is immediately turned over to the religious order, which is also responsible for contacting the authorities and investigating the priest.

The "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" applies to religious orders that maintain a presence within the Diocese of Green Bay as well. This means that the expectations are the same for the order. They must

promptly and thoroughly investigate any claims of abuse of minors, inform and cooperate with civil authorities, remove a member who faces an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor from active ministry, and inform me, as the bishop, of actions taken in this regard.

### **How does the diocese offer ongoing support to victims-survivors of sexual abuse? Is there a support group for victims-survivors?**

I have and will continue to meet with any victim-survivor who presents himself or herself and asks to see me personally. This has seemed to help the victims in their healing process and helps me to understand the gravity of the problem and the severe damage that this does to innocent children. Through our meetings, I have learned that this crime and mortal sin inflicted upon them leaves a huge wound in the soul of an innocent victim, which can scar that person for life. It is a wound that does grave damage to the person's soul, mind, body and emotions, and it does not heal quickly or easily. Although we know from experts that sexual abuse is a significant issue in the general population, when it is clergy who abuse, it does violence to a person's relationship with God. Because of this, we are always exploring new approaches to healing that seek to restore that relationship.

I am very grateful for the support group, Journey of Hope, which provides accompaniment for victims and also an annual retreat in the diocese. They are and will be helpful to people in the diocese who have suffered as a result of clergy sexual abuse.

The diocese also offers ongoing support to survivors of sexual abuse through diocesan funded counseling at Catholic Charities or with various professionals throughout the 16 counties of the diocese. Additional support occurs through the sponsoring of annual healing services during the month of April and participation in a healing retreat at St. Norbert Spirituality Center in De Pere, all of which are coordinated in partnership with Journey of Hope.

### **What is the diocese doing to reach out and encourage victims-survivors to come forward?**

We have taken a number of actions to encourage victims to come forward:

- There is information on the diocesan website, under the [Protecting Our Children tab](#), related to how to report abuse.
- All parishes and schools are encouraged to make available a brochure that outlines how to report abuse. This brochure is called "Promise to Protect, Pledge to Heal."
- Parishes and schools are also encouraged to make available a second brochure that outlines a number of the ongoing efforts of the Diocese of Green Bay to prevent sexual abuse and also includes directions and contact information about how to report abuse. This brochure is called "Preserving the Promise to Protect, Pledge to Heal."
- All clergy and employees of the Diocese of Green Bay must review and sign the "Our Promise to Protect Policy" each year. This policy outlines the responsibility to report any situations of potential abuse to civil and church authorities and provides the information on how to do so.
- All volunteers who minister to children and individuals at risk in the Diocese of Green Bay must read and sign the "Diocesan Code of Conduct" annually. This document affirms the expectations that they will report any concerns of sexual abuse to civil and church authorities and provides the information on how to do so.
- As part of our commitment to adhering to the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* all clergy, employees and volunteers in the diocese who minister to children or individuals at risk must attend Safe Environment Awareness education. Over 40,000 people have received this education that includes how to recognize behavioral indicators of a potential perpetrator or a potential victim of sexual abuse and how to report any concerns. Our goal is to flood our people with this knowledge to safeguard the children and individuals at risk whom we serve.
- Every parish is required to run an ad in their bulletin at least quarterly that informs people how to report sexual abuse. The ad is available in English and Spanish.
- The Diocesan newspaper, *The Compass*, runs an ad at least quarterly that informs people about how to report sexual abuse. The ad is run in English and Spanish.

### **How much funding has there been for assistance, settlements, and legal fees? Where does this funding come from?**

From 1950 to 2018, our insurance carrier has paid \$1,065,500. The remaining balance has been paid from the Diocese of Green Bay unrestricted reserves. Over the years, the diocese was able to build up unrestricted reserves (our savings account). It is from the investment return of past years that we have drawn funds for legal matters and the support of victim/survivors who require our support. No Bishop's Appeal funds have been used for legal costs. Our audited financial statements can be found on the diocesan website.