



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF GREEN BAY

P.O. Box 23825 • Green Bay, WI 54305-3825 • 920-272-8194 • FAX 920-435-1330

June 4, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with a heavy heart that I again write to you regarding the topic of clergy sexual abuse. As you are likely aware, Wisconsin State Attorney General (AG), Josh Kaul issued a press release and held a press conference in early May announcing a review of past clergy sexual abuse cases. This review does not imply that there are any new allegations against active priests or deacons in the Green Bay Diocese, yet it does again open wounds for those who have suffered clergy abuse as we, the Church, walk with victims/survivors in their healing process.

As the people of God, we continue to pray for those who have been affected by this abuse. For my part, I have and will continue to meet with and listen to any victim/survivor who wants to share his or her story. I am here to listen to the brave people who are willing to come forward and talk. This is one of the most heart wrenching and humbling experiences of my ministry. We can never apologize enough for the hurt that was caused through no fault of the victims/survivors. They are now and will always be a top priority for us.

Over the past several decades, the diocese has implemented a variety of tools to ensure the safety of every person in our 16 counties, including background checks (42,659 as of May 2021), rigorous safe environment training and education (47,508 individuals trained through the VIRTUS program), mandatory reporting mechanisms and outreach to survivors of abuse. As part of this effort, in the fall of 2018, the diocese engaged a reputable independent investigative firm to conduct an outside review of the files of all diocesan priests and deacons dating back 112 years. Their review led to the release of our list of clergy with substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of a minor in January 2019. The Diocese continues to update this list as needed as part of our “promise to protect and heal.”

It is because of our continued work, and commitment to walking with victims/survivors in their process of healing, that we, along with the other Wisconsin dioceses, are expressing concerns and skepticism regarding the legal basis for the information disclosure request which has been made by the Attorney General. The Diocese of Green Bay has already done a lot, but we will cooperate with the Attorney General in any lawful inquiry he might undertake. We will voluntarily provide, as has been our policy, access to documents and information on any living individuals against whom a new allegation is made. Any new prosecutable crimes will receive our full cooperation.

With this said, there is significant doubt that the Attorney General has the legal authority to conduct this review. We have genuine concerns as well, that his inquiry is directed only at the Catholic Church. We have accepted our history and have worked vigilantly to correct the way things were handled in the past, yet we continue to face continued scrutiny. No institution in the country has done more than the Catholic Church to tackle the societal issue of sexual abuse of minors in the past 20 years. In the Diocese of Green Bay, there have only been two allegations brought forward regarding conduct alleged to have occurred within the past 30 years. And while a single allegation is one too many, I think we can be very proud of our efforts over these past several decades. Rather than revisiting files from 40, 50, or even 60 years ago, it would seem a better idea for the Attorney General to hold up the Church as a model for how to establish policies, procedures and actions that assure sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults does not happen again.

It is important to me that you have information regarding this matter as we share our response with the Attorney General. I also want to again express my sincere apologies for the difficulty this situation continues to cause. It is my pledge to continue to keep you and all the faithful apprised of developments regarding this matter. The diocese will have little to no comments for the media while this matter is under review.

Please know that you will be in my prayers, especially during these coming days and I ask that you keep me in yours. I wish to emphasize that the Diocese of Green Bay remains dedicated to the protection of children and vulnerable adults.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David L. Ricken". The signature is written in black ink and includes a small cross symbol at the beginning of the first name.

Most Reverend David L. Ricken, DD, JCL
Bishop of Green Bay