

Frequently Asked Questions

Will the Bishop release the list of priests and deacons removed from ministry because of sexual abuse of a minor?

Yes. As has been reported in the news, some dioceses have decided to publish lists of all priests who have been accused of sexually abusing minors. The decision to do so has pros and cons. On the positive side, releasing such a list can reassure parents that their children are safe. A list also supports honorable priests not named on the list. Further, for some victims, disclosure can bring *closure*, in that they might find comfort in the fact that the identity of their abuser has been made known. Finally, the release of a list is consistent with our ideals of transparency.

Of course, there are negatives as well. In some cases, allegations were not credible or never proven. In those cases, the good names of priests who were never given the chance to defend themselves could be damaged. This is of particular concern when the priest is deceased and can no longer refute the allegations. There are practical problems as well. Once a list is produced, it will need to be maintained and amended as necessary.

After prayer and discussion, Bishop Deshotel, along with bishops of other dioceses in Louisiana, have decided that the positives reasons outweigh the negative ones, and so he has committed to releasing a list of priests and deacons removed from ministry because of sexual abuse of a minor. The compilation of the list will seek to be done in a way that is as complete and as accurate as possible, and in keeping with the concerns listed above.

How will the Bishop determine if an accusation of sexual abuse of a minor is “credible”?

All victims are encouraged to report abuse to authorities. In many cases, Louisiana law determines that clergy, staff and volunteers are mandated reporters. Prior to 2002, determinations regarding credibility of accusations were predominately handled by bishops. However, immediately following Vatican II, committees of lay community leaders were sometimes put together to advise and or even investigate allegations on behalf of the Bishop. The Diocese of Lafayette began using these lay committees long before most other dioceses. Since the adoption in 2002 of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* in this Diocese, accusations involving the sexual abuse of minors are presented to the Sexual Abuse Review Board. The Board then advises the Bishop regarding whether the priest or deacon should be placed on administrative leave pending a permanent decision about the cleric’s suitability for ministry. The Review Board has the right to request additional information as necessary before making a recommendation. The Sexual Abuse Review Board is racially diverse and consists of lay professionals representing the fields of law enforcement, psychology, and education; the group includes parents, men and women.

How have abuse allegations been handled by the Diocese in recent years?

All victims are encouraged to report abuse to authorities. When a victim is a minor, clergy and parish staff and volunteers are required under Louisiana law to report such abuse to civil authorities such as the police. The facts dictate how we proceed, guided by both canon law

and civil law. Even in these instances, out of concern for the safety of children, the minister is restricted from practicing as a priest pending a complete investigation.

Many of the allegations in the United States concern the period between 1965 and 1985. Since the mid-1980s when the Diocese implemented our Safe Environment program, the number of allegations of abuse has decreased dramatically. However, if an allegation seems to be true, regardless of how long ago it occurred, the priest is removed from ministry. This has happened most recently with Reverend David Broussard (convicted of possessing child pornography), Reverend Michael Guidry (convicted of molestation of a juvenile) and Monsignor Robie Robichaux (accused of molesting a juvenile) and Reverend Jody Simoneaux (accused of molestation of a juvenile).

What is the status of the case of Michael Guidry?

The St. Landry Parish District Attorney's Office charged Michael Guidry with molestation of a juvenile. The Diocese of Lafayette has paid no legal fees for Michael Guidry, nor has it posted bond for him, and it does not plan to do so in the future. Michael Guidry continues to be restricted from practicing as a priest. On March 27, 2019 he pleaded guilty to molestation of a juvenile and he awaits sentencing.

What is the status of the case of Robie Robichaux?

In response to Bishop Deshotel's statement about the status of priests in ministry and the invitation for anyone with information about abuse, past or present, to come forward, Bishop Deshotel was informed on September 18, 2018 of an accusation of sexual abuse of a minor against Robie Robichaux with alleged abuse occurring between 1979 and 1981. The matter was referred to the Sexual Abuse Review Board, which unanimously advised the Bishop of its belief that the allegation was considered credible. In keeping with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* and the Essential Norms, Diocesan Policy and Canon Law, the investigation warranted placing Robichaux on administrative leave and he was removed from his position as Judicial Vicar (head of the marriage tribunal). Following Bishop Deshotel's call for other victims to come forward, a second adult woman contacted the Diocese of Lafayette on October 12, 2018, alleging inappropriate sexual contact with Robichaux sometime between 1975 and 1985.

What is the status of the case of Kenneth Morvant?

The Diocese of Lafayette has been made aware of allegations of sexual abuse of minors against Kenneth Morvant (deceased), alleged to have happened 35 to 40 years ago. Morvant served as a priest from 1961 to 2003, a period of 42 years, before he died on December 13, 2003. As the civil proceedings go forward, the Diocese of Lafayette continues to conduct its own independent investigation.

What is the status of the case of Jody J. Simoneaux?

On August 27, 2018, Bishop Deshotel was informed of an accusation against Simoneaux concerning inappropriate behavior with a minor. After a preliminary investigation, the Bishop determined the allegation was credible, so, he placed Simoneaux on administrative leave effective November 1, 2018. The Diocese reported the matter to civil authorities, who continue to investigate the allegations, and the Diocese is cooperating in that investigation.

How can someone report abuse?

The Diocese of Lafayette is committed to following all civil and church laws regarding reporting child abuse. If you have reason to believe that a child is being abused or neglected by a parent or caretaker, call the Louisiana Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline at 1.855.452.5437. If suspected abuse is related to a diocesan church or school program, or if abuse was allegedly committed by anyone acting as a church volunteer, first, report the allegation to the civil authorities, such as the police department or sheriff's office. Second, report the allegation to Mrs. Maureen Fontenot, Chancellor, at 337.261.5613. Note that if a cleric or lay person receives an allegation of sexual abuse by a bishop, priest or deacon, he or she must report it first to civil authorities; then to the diocesan Victims Assistance Coordinator, Mr. Joseph Pisano, Jr. (337.298.2987), and then contact our Vicar General, Monsignor Curtis Mallet. For more information about reporting abuse, see <https://www.diolaf.org/what-to-do>.

Are there safeguards in place for those who have contact with children?

Yes, there are many. All clergy, lay employees, and volunteers whose work/ministry involves contact with children must undergo a criminal background check before volunteering or working with children. We also require and document reference checks for all new employees and ALL volunteers who will work with children. Additionally, all school employees and volunteer coaches must be fingerprinted before they are permitted to work with children.

Approximately 51,000 individuals have received criminal background checks and received the initial training in the Safe Environment program in the Diocese of Lafayette since 2003. The initial training for Safe Environment always includes information about statistics on sexual abuse of minors, signs of sexual abuse, and the grooming process. Currently, there are 17,910 active volunteers who have received ongoing training in the past year. These screening processes work; since 2002, 159 individuals have been identified as unsuitable and have been prevented from volunteering or working with minors in our Diocese. Most importantly, Safe Environment is more than a program. Rather, it promotes a culture of awareness and reduces the opportunities for abuse of minors and vulnerable adults.

Questions and answers pertaining to the Charter, Code of Conduct, Essential Norms, the National Review Board and Safe Environment training can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/faqs.cfm>.

How are victim settlements paid?

Claims and settlements are paid by the insurance program of the Diocese. The following means of stewardship are not used to pay victims: offertory (collection) monies, BSA (Bishop's

Services Appeal), and the Centennial Campaign funds. Please be assured that every dollar donated to the BSA and Centennial Campaign is going only to the causes advertised.

How does the Bishop deal with a priest who has violated his vow of celibacy with another adult?

All priests are bound by the commitments made at ordination, including a commitment to celibacy. Further, all priests have signed a Code of Professional Conduct and are to conduct themselves accordingly. Non-criminal behavior that is a violation of priestly celibacy is handled by the bishop, who can apply discipline with a view to protecting the common good.

Discipline is proportionate to the offence, and while corrective measures are always taken, they are not usually made public. If a violation with an adult is slight, a suitable corrective action (e.g. penance and counseling) is imposed, and the priest is permitted to return to ministry with appropriate warnings. If the violation is severe, the priest may be asked to voluntarily seek a dispensation from his priestly obligations, or he may be forcibly and permanently dismissed from priestly ministry.

As in all situations, anonymity in complainants creates difficulty in assessing the credibility of a complaint.

What has really changed since 2002?

A timeline may be helpful to answer this question.

1984 – News broke in the Church and in the broader society of victims of clergy sexual abuse coming forward to report allegations. The Diocese of Lafayette was the first to deal with major public revelations of abuse of minors by priests. The accused priests were removed from ministry permanently and subjected to criminal charges.

Mid-1980s – A number of civil suits were filed against the Diocese. Over the years, those worked their way through the courts, resulting in settlements paid to victims. Some victims were provided counseling and health care assistance. In some cases, per the request of the victims who wanted to remain anonymous, confidentiality agreements were signed.

2002 – After the abuse scandal broke in Boston, the U.S. Bishops met in Dallas in June 2002 and released the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* (later revised in 2005, 2011, and 2018). In keeping with that Charter, the Diocese of Lafayette implemented updated policies for working with minors to conform to the Charter. Commonly called the “Safe Environment Policy,” it required adherence to a “Code of Professional Conduct” for all clergy, employees, and all volunteers who have contact with children. These policies called for the permanent exclusion from ministry of any cleric found guilty of child sexual abuse, as well as any employee or volunteer.

Post-2002 – The Diocese implemented a program of training for employees and volunteers aimed at creating a “safe environment” for children in our parishes and schools. Known as the “Safe Environment Program,” it is more extensive than most people are aware. The Diocesan Safe Environment policy includes the following:

- Annually, all children and adolescents in Catechism (CCD) and Catholic Schools receive age-appropriate training about proper and improper conduct by adults, how to recognize abusive behavior, and how to report abusive behavior to an adult.
- Criminal background checks are required for all clergy, seminarians, lay employees and volunteers who work with children.
- Prospective candidates for seminary formation are rigorously screened. (Please see the question regarding seminarians for more details.)
- If an individual’s criminal background check deems them ineligible, the Pastor or Principal is immediately notified, and he or she is excluded from working with or volunteering with children.
- All school employees and volunteer coaches are fingerprinted.
- All who work with children are required to complete initial in-person Safe Environment Training, which covers statistical data regarding sexual abuse of minors, signs of sexual abuse, diocesan mandates such as the Diocesan Policy, Code of Professional Conduct, and the Social Media Policy. Also discussed is the grooming process, along with appropriate and inappropriate behavior.
- All clergy, staff and volunteers are trained to understand that they are mandated reporters regarding any knowledge of child abuse and instructed regarding how to report to police authorities.
- All clergy, staff and volunteers must sign and agree to act in accordance with a Code of Professional Conduct that specifically prohibits being alone with a minor without the presence of another Safe Environment-trained adult or the parent/guardian of the minor.
- All who work with children are required to receive annual Safe Environment continuing education including the following topics: internet safety, bullying, cyber-bullying, pornography, and all abuses.
- All visiting clergy from other Dioceses intending to minister in the Diocese of Lafayette must have a letter of suitability from their Diocese or Religious Order which indicates they are unaware of anything in their background which would render them unsafe to work with minor children before they are allowed to minister in the Diocese of Lafayette.
- The Sexual Abuse Review Board advises the Bishop regarding the suitability of priests and deacons for ministry and Safe Environment policies.
- An annual audit of Safe Environment in the Diocese is conducted by an independent auditing firm hired by the Office of Child and Youth Protection and is tasked with

assuring the compliance of the Diocese with all norms of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*.

- The Victim's Assistance Coordinator (Mr. Joseph Pisano, a retired FBI Agent) assists victims in reporting abuse and coordinates help for those who (when minors) suffered sexual abuse by clergy.

The Diocese continues to this day to adhere strictly to these policies. In the last national audit of compliance, the Diocese received a mark of 100%. Nevertheless, the most rigorous background checks possible will not catch a first offender and no one is able to respond to abuse that is not reported in an effective manner.

2018 – The Diocese removed three clerics pursuant to its policy of zero tolerance. Two of these instances involved allegations having occurred decades ago. In all three cases, the cleric was immediately removed from ministry, and law enforcement was promptly informed by the Diocese. The Diocese cooperated, and continues to cooperate, fully in investigations of child sex abuse. Available information was shared to parishioners and to the broader community through the media. The Diocese continues to request that if anyone suspects a cleric is guilty of abuse of a minor, he or she should immediately inform law enforcement.

How does a man become a seminarian (one who studies for the priesthood)?

The process and requirements for a man to be accepted as a seminarian are as follows. First, the candidate meets several times with the Director of Vocations, who assesses the candidate's maturity and ability to succeed in seminary formation. If the Director of Vocations judges the candidate is ready to apply, he recommends the candidate to the Director of Seminarians, who interviews the candidate regarding his commitment to Catholic morality, as well as his spirituality, family history, employment history, academic record, personal relationships, and readiness to discern chaste celibacy. Upon receiving satisfactory results from the intake interview, the candidate is then invited to officially apply.

The application process itself contains a number of dimensions: full physical examination; a complete battery of psychological testing (including clinical interview, WAIS-IV, MMPI-2, a projective assessment, and an additional assessment of personality traits) by a third-party licensed professional with a doctorate in clinical psychology; ten reference letters from persons knowledgeable about the moral character of the candidate, including their conduct around children; a written autobiography; a criminal background check; Safe Environment initial training; requisite sacramental documents; and examination of canonical impediments. Once all the elements of the application are gathered, the file is presented to the Bishop for official acceptance. After being accepted, the new seminarian must then apply to the particular seminary to which he is assigned. Each seminary has its own requirements beyond that of the Diocese. These would be similar to the requirements of any academic institution of higher learning.

How is the issue of homosexuality addressed with regard to seminarians?

The Diocese follows the Church's authoritative criteria contained in an "Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of Their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders" from 2005. That document states the Church "cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies, or support the so-called 'gay culture.'"

How does a man become a priest?

In order for a seminarian to receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders and become an ordained Catholic priest, he must undergo a program of priestly formation which consists of four dimensions: spiritual, human, intellectual and pastoral. Each dimension carries with it requirements and benchmarks appropriate to various levels of formation.

Every seminary has a formation council or team consisting of priests which observes the external behavior of seminarians. In Louisiana, the undergraduate and graduate seminaries include lay men and women on their academic faculties. Members of the formation council meet frequently with the Rector of the seminary to share their observations. The Diocesan Director of Seminarians is in regular contact with members of the formation council.

The academic dimension of formation is naturally gauged through the grading of examinations and papers. Seminarians receive written evaluations from their supervisors in pastoral assignments. This includes apostolic works during the academic year, such as working in nursing homes and teaching the Catholic faith in church parishes near the seminary, and in church parishes during the summer months back in the Diocese of Lafayette. The Diocesan Director of Seminarians visits privately with each seminarian to assess his current commitment to formation, as well as to give feedback from their supervisors from the summer assignment.

Annually, the seminary faculty holds a formal evaluation and votes upon each seminarian. There must be a majority vote in favor of the seminarian advancing for him to be invited to return for another year of formation. The Diocesan Director of Seminarians is present for these evaluations and communicates the content of the proceedings to the Bishop. Additionally, the faculty votes before recommending a seminarian be ordained to the diaconate, and again before ordination to priesthood.

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