



Catholic Diocese
of Brownsville

(<https://www.cdob.org/>)

Clergy Disclosure List

List of Clergy with Credible Allegation of Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the Diocese of Brownsville

As the Catholic faithful of the Rio Grande Valley, we share responsibility for the life and mission of the Church. We are committed to providing a safe environment for children.

The Diocese of Brownsville, established in 1965, comprises 4,296 square miles in a four-county area, serving more than one million Catholics, or 85 percent of the total population. There are 72 parishes in the Diocese and 43 mission churches, currently served by 109 priests.

As part of the ongoing work to protect children from sexual abuse and to promote healing and a restoration of trust in the Catholic Church, the bishops of the Catholic dioceses in Texas made a decision on Sept. 30, 2018 to release names of all clergy who have been credibly accused of sexually abusing a minor since 1950.

A team of eight lay persons (seven women and one male) who hold positions of trust in the public and private sector, reviewed files of all bishops, priests, and deacons dating back to 1965 when the Diocese of Brownsville was founded. They, along with the assistance of the Chancellor and Victims Assistance Coordinator, reviewed each file to identify any credible allegation of clergy sexual abuse of a minor. Every record in our archives has been reviewed.

Of the seven bishops, 711 priests and 171 deacons who have served in the Diocese of Brownsville since it was established in 1965, 14 clergy were identified (13 priests and one permanent deacon). None of the clergy listed are in active ministry in the Diocese of Brownsville.

All the cases reported, with the exception of one, occurred before the year 2002. It is important to be aware that in several cases there was a gap between the time of the abuse and the time that the allegation was first reported.

A “credible allegation” is one that, after review of reasonably available, relevant information in consultation with the Diocesan Review Board or other professionals, there is reason to believe is true. A credible allegation does not necessarily mean “guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.”

Among the criteria used by the review team are the following: criminal conviction; indictment that was not defeated; legally mediated agreement; admission by cleric or religious; determination by Texas Department of Family and Protective Services; other adjudication, whether civil or canonical; Review Board recommendation; or prior determination by the bishop.

The list that follows was provided by the review team, which spent more than 500 hours collectively looking at everything the Diocese has in its files, in an effort to provide healing to victims and an even safer environment for children. Should any subsequent credible allegations be reported, this list will be updated accordingly.

List of Clergy with Credible Allegation of Sexual Abuse of a Minor before the Year 2002

PLEASE NOTE: *This information about parish assignments is provided for the welfare of the Christian faithful and is not an indication that abuse occurred at any of these locations.*

Humberto Acosta

Born: February 7, 1949

Ordained: May 30, 1974

Left diocese in 1994. Allegation fully disclosed to receiving Military Ordinary in Venezuela.

Assignments: St. Mary, Mother of the Church, Brownsville; St. Joseph Church, Edinburg; St. Anthony Church, Harlingen; Our Lady of Mercy Church, Mercedes; St. Margaret Mary Church, Pharr

Lee DaCosta

Born: June 29, 1937

Ordained: April 23, 1973

Retired in 2012. Faculties removed in 2019 after review team identified him as a priest who had a credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor.

Assignments: Sacred Heart Church, Edinburg; Sacred Heart Church, Escobares; St. Theresa Mission Church, Faysville; St. Anthony Church, Harlingen; Holy Family Church, La Grulla; St. Joseph the Worker Church, McAllen; Sacred Heart Church, McAllen; St. Joseph the Worker Mission Church, San Carlos; St. Anne Mission Church, San Manuel; Immaculate Conception Church, Rio Grande City; Our Lady, Queen of the Universe Church, San Benito; St. Joan of Arc Church, Weslaco; San Martin Porres Church, Weslaco; St. Pius X Church, Weslaco

George B. Dyer, O.P.

(deceased)

Born: January 6, 1935

Ordained: June 9, 1961 for the Dominican Friars

He returned to the Dominican Friars in 1983.

Died: 2013

Assignments: St. Luke Church, Brownsville; Campus Ministry, Brownsville and Edinburg

Armando Escobedo

Born: June 8, 1936

Ordained: June 6, 1964

Removed from ministry in 2002.

Assignments: Christ the King Church, Brownsville; St. Luke Church, Brownsville; St. Francis Xavier Cabrini Church, Laredo; Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Lyford; Our Lady of Mercy Church, Mercedes; Our Lady of St. John of the Fields Church, Mission; St. Anthony Church, Raymondville

Terrence Fowler

Born: March 18, 1961

Ordained: June 4, 1988

Faculties removed in 1998. Laicization in process.

Assignments: St. Joseph Church, Alamo; Christ the King Church, Brownsville; St. Luke Church, Brownsville; Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, Harlingen; Our Lady, Queen of the Universe Church, San Benito

Frank Gomez

(deceased)

Born: October 28, 1928

Ordained: May 27, 1961

Died: May 20, 2014

Faculties removed in 1994.

Assignments: St. Joseph Church, Alamo; Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Brownsville; St. Francis Xavier Cabrini Church, Laredo; St. Francis Xavier Church, La Feria; Sacred Heart Church, Mercedes; St. Theresa Church, San Benito; St. Mary Church, Santa Rosa; San Martin de Porres Church, Weslaco;

James Jeffrey

(deceased)

Born: June 15, 1933

Ordained: May 30, 1959 for the Diocese of Fargo, North Dakota

Died: May 28, 2017

A priest who was on loan to Diocese of Brownsville. Faculties removed in 1988 and he returned to home diocese.

Assignments: Christ the King Church, Brownsville; St. Francis Xavier Church, La Feria

Basil Onyia

Born: May 22, 1966

Ordained: July 13, 1996 for the Diocese of Aba in Nigeria

On loan from the Diocese of Aba from 1999 to 2001.

Removed from ministry in 2001. He fled the country after he was reported to civil authorities.

Laicized: 2016

Assignments: Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, Harlingen; Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle-National Shrine, San Juan

Benedicto Ortiz

(deceased)

Born: September 1, 1930

Ordained: April 13, 1957 for the Diocese of Areciba in Puerto Rico

Incardinated to the Diocese of Brownsville: June 1, 1974

Died: May 14, 2011

Credible abuse report received in 2016.

Assignments: Good Shepherd Church, Brownsville; Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Brownsville; St. Anthony Church, Harlingen; Our Lady of Sorrows Church, McAllen; St. Anne, Mother of Mary Church, Pharr; Knapp Memorial Methodist Hospital, Weslaco; and HCA Rio Grande Regional Hospital, McAllen

Salvador Rangel, MSF

(deceased)

Born: August 6, 1947

Ordained: September 1, 1973

Died: May 18, 2002

Removed from ministry in 1977, returned to his religious community

Assignments: St. Joseph Church, Donna; Our Lady of Assumption Church, Harlingen; Valley Baptist Medical Center, Harlingen

Ivan M. Rovira

Born: March 26, 1945

Ordained: May 30, 1971 for the Diocese of Rockford

Incardinated to Diocese of Brownsville: June 6, 1977

Faculties removed in 2002.

Assignments: Holy Family Church, Brownsville; St. Mary, Mother of the Church, Brownsville; Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Brownsville; St. Joseph Church, Edinburg; Our Lady of Sorrows Church, McAllen; St. Joseph & St. Peter Seminary, Mission; St. Pius X Church, Weslaco

Salomon (David) Sandoval

(deceased)

Born: October 16, 1950

Ordained: June 30, 1979

Died: Date unknown

Removed from ministry in the Diocese of Brownsville 1986. Allegation fully disclosed to receiving bishop in Ciudad Victoria.

Assignments: Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Brownsville; St. Joseph Church, Edinburg; Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Church, Mission; San Martin de Porres Church, Weslaco

Marti G. Zuber

Born: May 11, 1950

Ordained: June 26, 1976

Removed from ministry in 1993.

Laicized: 2018

Assignments: St. Joseph Church, Edinburg; Campus Ministry, Edinburg; St. Anthony Church, Harlingen; St. Joseph Church the Worker, McAllen; Holy Spirit Church, McAllen; Immaculate Conception Church, McCook; Holy Spirit Church, Progreso; St. Anthony Church, Raymondville; San Martin de Porres Church, Weslaco;

List of Clergy with Credible Allegation of Sexual Abuse of a Minor after the Year 2002

Ronaldo Mitchell Chavez

Born: August 13, 1973

Ordained to permanent diaconate: December 18, 2010

He was removed from active ministry in 2012. Pled guilty and sentenced to seven years in prison.

Assignments: San Cristobal Magallanes & Companions Church, Mission

Terms Used

Faculties – Permissions given by a bishop to a priest or deacon to perform certain ministerial acts. Faculties for both deacons and priests typically include the right to administer the sacraments of Baptism and Marriage, to preside at funerals, and to assist in other liturgies. Some faculties are reserved to priests and bishops, such as celebrating the Mass (Sacrament of the Eucharist), hearing confessions (Sacrament of Penance), anointing (Sacrament of Anointing the Sick).

Incardinated – Term used when a given priest or deacon is received into the jurisdiction of a bishop.

Removed from ministry – faculties or permissions to serve in ministry in or for the Diocese of Brownsville, or on behalf of a religious order, have been removed or suspended. Removal from ministry occurs before a laicization process begins (for ordained ministers) or before a process of expulsion from a religious order (for religious priests, brothers, or sisters). Laicization or expulsion are not automatically initiated after a man or woman is removed from ministry. A bishop or religious superior may determine that removal from ministry is warranted in a particular case but laicization or expulsion is not.

Laicization – The return of a priest or deacon to the status of a lay person. A priest or deacon is not “un-ordained” through the process of laicization. Rather, the obligations of his ordination are dispensed, and the bishop’s obligations to him are relieved.