

## **Catholic Diocese of Joliet Releases 54 Years of Data on Sexual Abuse of Minors by Clergy**

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**(JOLIET, Ill. – February 21, 2004)** In the 54 years since the founding of the Catholic Diocese of Joliet in 1949, 27 diocesan priests had 113 credible allegations of sexual misconduct with a minor made against them, the diocese said in a report issued today. That number represents approximately 3.5% of the 773 priests who have served in the Joliet Diocese from 1949 through 2003.

Not one of these priests is in ministry today. Of the 27, five are deceased and eight left ministry during the past 30 years. Fourteen priests were placed on Administrative leave; six of them before June of 2002 and eight others after June of 2002, including two during this past year. Of the fourteen who were placed on Administrative Leave, seven are retired.

In addition to these 27 priests, the Diocesan Review Committee found that allegations against seven other priests were not credible.

“Abuse of minors is a terrible crime especially when the abuse was committed by a priest who is called to be a witness of Christ’s love on earth”, said Joliet’s Bishop Joseph L. Imesch. “A great cloud was cast over the entire Church because love was replaced with sinful abuse. I apologize to those children and young people. I sincerely regret that those who trusted their priests received such shameful treatment. In the past, insufficient understanding led to insufficient action. However, that is not the case today. As the U.S. Catholic Bishops promised in June 2002, no priest who has had a credible allegation made against him is permitted to minister.”

The information was gathered for the diocesan response to a survey conducted by researchers at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. At their June 2002 meeting in Dallas, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops called for a survey to determine the nature and scope of known sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. The results of the

national study, covering 195 U.S. Catholic dioceses during the period between 1950 and 2003 will be released on February 27, 2004.

“We hope that this report will aid in the process of healing for anyone who has been harmed by the sexual abuse of a minor,” Imesch said. “I believe that once the full extent of abuse is known, it will help our efforts in preventing any future abuse to become even more effective.”

In its report, the Diocese said:

Although most of the cases of abuse occurred in the 70’s and 80’s, nearly half of all allegations were only received by the Diocese since 2000.

During the 54-year period, the Diocese has provided therapy for victims and priests in the amount of approximately \$690,000.

The Diocese has settled civil cases with a number of victims. While the Diocese spent approximately \$1,940,000 on settlements, an additional \$837,000 was paid by insurance. Diocesan funds used for settlements were obtained from the sale of real estate and investment proceeds. No funds came from parishioners’ donations to parishes or from any contributions to the Diocesan Annual Appeal.

Legal fees amounted to \$744,526, more than 90% of which was paid by the insurance company. By diocesan policy, priests pay their own legal expenses. If they are falsely accused, they are reimbursed for these expenses.

Approximately 11,000 persons including priests, deacons, lay employees and volunteers have already participated in the Virtus *Protecting God’s Children* program since June of 2003. Criminal background checks are required of clergy, school and religious-education administrators, teachers, catechists, athletic personnel, diocesan employees, and any others, including volunteers or contractors, who have significant or sustained contact with children.

For more than 20 years, the Diocese has required psychological testing for all candidates prior to their admission to the seminary.

Last month, the National Review Board announced that since the adoption of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, approved by the USCCB in June of 2002, the Diocese of Joliet was in full compliance with the Charter's provisions. The Diocese was commended for taking a proactive stance in establishing a Diocesan Review Committee in 1990 to review allegations of sexual abuse and for requiring firms contracting work in the diocese to provide background checks for all their personnel.

The Diocese has taken a number of preventive steps to ensure the safety of children [See attached fact sheet].

“Although I already have met with a number of victims, I renew my willingness to meet with persons who have been abused, including those who have not yet come forward,” Imesch said. “I want to express my sincere apologies to all of the victims of abuse, to their families, to parishioners in the Diocese and to others who have suffered and continue to suffer because of the sins of a few. We cannot change the past, but we can put our full efforts into building a brighter future for all children. I pledge to do whatever I can to help with the victims’ healing process.”

## FACT SHEET

### Catholic Diocese of Joliet programs to protect God's children

■ Anyone who has had a credible allegation of sexual misconduct placed against him/her is not permitted to exercise ministry in the Diocese.

■ The Review Committee, established in 1990 to review allegations of sexual abuse, continues its work of reviewing allegations. The current structure of the Review Committee has been in place since 1993. Its members include: a woman attorney, a member of a county states attorney's office, two women therapists, two retired judges, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a pastor, and a former sexual abuse investigator with the state police.

■ All cases of sexual abuse of a minor from 1970 onward have been turned over to the States Attorney's office for review. The diocese continues to cooperate with civil officials.

■ The Virtus *Protecting God's Children* program was adopted for use throughout the Diocese in 2003. Parish facilitators provide educational sessions for clergy, teachers, catechists, and others who have regular, sustained contact with children. Participants learn to avoid situations that could lead to sexual abuse as well as to recognize the warning signs of a perpetrator.

■ Sister Mary Frances Seeley, OSF, was appointed as Victim Assistance Coordinator in 2002. She is responsible for offering support to victims by providing them with information about counseling, spiritual direction, retreats, days of reflection, etc. as well as extending an invitation to meet with the Bishop should that be desired. She also advises persons to contact law enforcement officials in order to report abuse. Sister Mary Frances Seeley can be contacted at 815/263-6467.

■ The *Diocesan Pastoral Policy Regarding Sexual Abuse of Minors* was revised in 2003. It was distributed to all clergy, religious, diocesan, parish, school and religious education personnel. (The original policy in place since 1990, had undergone revisions in 1993 and 1997.)

■ A document entitled *Standards of Behavior for Those Working with Minors* was published on June 1, 2003. It details standards of ministerial behavior and appropriate boundaries for clergy as well as for other church personnel who have regular contact with children and young people. Copies were distributed to all clergy, religious, diocesan, parish, school and religious education personnel as well as to parents of children in school and religious education programs.

■ Prior to anyone being accepted as a seminarian for the Diocese, he must undergo a thorough screening by the Vocation Office. This also includes a background check.

■ Before any priest or deacon can begin ministry in the Joliet Diocese, his bishop or major superior must provide the Diocese with any information about his fitness for ministry, including knowledge of allegations regarding sexual abuse.

For more information, please visit the Diocesan Web site at [www.dioceseofjoliet.org](http://www.dioceseofjoliet.org).