



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE

Statement of The Catholic Diocese of Belleville Regarding the Preliminary Report of the Illinois Attorney General December 20, 2018

The Catholic Diocese of Belleville has cooperated fully with the Illinois Attorney General's Office and provided it with all the information and records it requested.

The Diocese formed its Review Board in 1993 to investigate any allegations of childhood sexual abuse directed against any member of the clergy in the Diocese. Since then, and in accordance with every recommendation made by the Review Board, the Diocese has removed a total of 17 members of the clergy from ministry. The vast majority of these credibly accused clergy were removed in the early to mid-1990's; only three such removals have been necessary since 1998 and only one since 2002. The Diocese publicly announced all such removals at the time they occurred, and the names of all 17 removed clergy were posted on the Diocese's website, www.diobelle.org/faith-formation/child-protection, at its own initiative.

The Attorney General's preliminary report cites combined statistics for all six Illinois dioceses of the Province of Chicago without delineating between them. This could give the false impression that a significant number of credibly accused Belleville clergy has not been disclosed. This is incorrect. The Diocese of Belleville has publicly identified all members of its clergy who were credibly accused and removed from ministry, and the Attorney General's Office has not advised the Diocese of any perceived omissions or errors in its public listing.

The Diocese believes that the education, training, prevention and investigation policies and procedures it has put into place over the past twenty-five years has dramatically improved the protection of children entrusted to our care. Nearly all allegations of childhood sexual abuse against clergy of which the Diocese is aware occurred decades ago, with no allegations of reported abuse against our clergy occurring after 2000.

Bishop Edward K. Braxton said, "Even though I appreciate the progress we have made in addressing the sin, scandal and crime of the abuse of minors, I continue to regret the unspeakable pain and suffering that the survivors of past abuse and their family members continue to bear. I think of them and pray for them each day and prayerfully ask them and God for forgiveness. I understand well that we priests are held to a higher standard. Therefore, even one instance of a deacon, priest or bishop sexually abusing a child is deplorable. Following the recommendations of our recent outside audit, I have mandated changes in our Diocesan Review Board to make it stronger and more effective. We must remain vigilant and continue to improve our efforts to safeguard our children. I personally urge anyone with knowledge of sexual misconduct by a priest or other Diocesan personnel to report it promptly to the appropriate civil authorities and to call our hotline immediately at 1-800-640-3044."

"As the Bishop of the Diocese of Belleville and aware that we are preparing to celebrate the great mystery of the birth of Jesus Christ, I ask all of the People of God in Southern Illinois to join me during these Holy Days in praying for all who are suffering from these terrible events. Pray for and assist all survivors of childhood sexual abuse; pray for their family and friends; pray for the offenders; and pray for the vast majority of priests who have harmed no one."