

Frequently Asked Questions: Diocese of Sioux City Clergy Disclosure List

Why are so many dioceses publicly releasing names now?

The church, in acknowledging there is a problem with sexual misconduct among priests, is trying to offer more transparency and provide information on what steps have been taken to address this issue. It is up to each individual diocese to determine whether to release the names of accused priests.

The Diocese of Sioux City, like many other dioceses around the country, has chosen to do so and believes it is one of many steps needed to help foster healing for victims who have suffered tremendous betrayal and pain. The Diocese also wants to rebuild people's trust in them and let everyone know they prayerfully considered this important step and believe it's the right thing to do.

Why are you sharing the Clergy Disclosure List now?

The Diocese of Sioux City is sharing the list of priests credibly accused of sexual abuse to tell victims, "we believe you," and to help foster healing for victims who have suffered tremendous betrayal and pain. The Diocese also wants to rebuild people's trust in them and let everyone know they prayerfully considered this important step and believe it's the right thing to do.

How was the list developed?

In 2002, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops created the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," which is a comprehensive document detailing the protocol for preventing, responding to and disciplining offenders of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. In response to this, the Diocese of Sioux City began reviewing "credible accusations" via the Diocesan Review Board, which provided recommendations on courses of action. The list released is a result of the review board's work, in addition to an examination of the files of every priest in the diocese by the diocese's attorney. A "credible accusation" has been defined by the board as one that could have happened. The Bishop accepted the review boards' recommendations in full, and each recommended priest was added to the list. One has since been removed, pending an appeal by that priest to the Vatican.

What is defined as "sexual abuse" and "credible"?

In developing this list, we determined any type of sexual conduct by a member of the clergy against a minor – male or female – is defined as "sexual abuse." Our definition of "credible" is based on the board's consideration of any objective information available, including consistency of the testimony of witnesses, physical evidence, and accuracy of the details, such as the placement of the accused at the time the allegation is said to have taken place. In addition, the board considered other corroborating evidence from files, or other possible witnesses.

Who is on the Diocesan Review Board?

The Diocesan Review Board was created in 2002 and is an advisory board made up of seven, voting members, who are lay people from the Diocese. The board meets as needed and has convened more than 80 times since it was formed to address allegations made. These board members include licensed therapists, a judge, nurses, police officers, and a psychiatrist. In addition, five or six resource people from the Diocese regularly attend the board meetings, this includes Bishop Nickless and the Diocese's legal counsel.

How many priests have been named in the list?

The list currently contains 28 names. The list originally contained 29 names; however, the diocese received notification that one of the priests has appealed to Rome, and therefore his information is being withheld pending resolution. This is a living document and will be updated with information as this case is resolved and if new victims come forward.

What information is on the list?

The list will contain the name of each priest, the year he was ordained, and all of the assignments he held within the Diocese, including parish and school roles. It will also contain the number and gender of the victims he is accused of sexually abusing and his current status. As additional victims come forward, more names could be added to this list.

How many victims are there?

Through the diligent work of the review board, we identified 106 individuals, who came forward with credible allegations dating back to 1948.

How is the Diocese of Sioux City helping victims?

The Diocese of Sioux City connects all victims to an independent Victim Assistance Coordinator for professional support and care. She is not employed by the Diocese. In addition, since 2002, the Diocese of Sioux City has paid 58 individuals monetary settlements totaling more than \$4.5 million. We also continue to pray each day for healing and peace for victims, comfort for their families and courage for other victims to come forward and tell us their story and/or seek professional counseling.

Why are some priest's names who have been in the media, not on the list?

The list only reflects the names of priests who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse of a minor, both female and male.

What is the protocol when someone makes an accusation against a priest in the Diocese of Sioux City today?

When a victim reaches out to the Diocese of Sioux City with an allegation of sexual abuse, the following steps are taken:

1. We listen to the victim and tell them, "We believe you."
2. We call the police and also encourage the victim to contact law enforcement.
3. We contact the independent Victim Assistance Coordinator to begin providing professional support for the victim.
4. We suspend the priest from his duties as a priest until the accusation is resolved.

5. The Diocesan Review Team conducts a detailed review of the accusation to determine if it is credible.
6. If the accusation of child sexual abuse is determined to be credible, the Diocese then takes the necessary disciplinary action, which could include being permanently removed from ministry.

What disciplinary actions have been taken against priests on the list?

All of the individuals named have had their *faculties removed* which means they cannot celebrate mass, participate in active ministry, or present themselves as a priest.

In looking at actions taken against priests, what does laicize or defrock mean?

In the canon law of the Catholic Church, the loss of the clerical state is commonly referred to as being laicized, which is the removal of a bishop, priest or deacon from the status of being a member of the clergy. This process must go through the Vatican. Defrocking has the same meaning, but this term is not officially recognized as a part of canon law.

What is a “life of prayer and penance?”

When assigned prayer and penance, the priest is directed by the Vatican to spend the rest of his life in prayer and penance which means to: overcome selfishness; live a holy life; be closer to Jesus; and show others the love and compassion of Jesus. It is part of the healing that the sacrament brings.

Why isn't the former Bishop Soens on the list?

Accusations previously made against Bishop Soens occurred during his time with the Diocese of Davenport and there were no allegations made against him as the Bishop in Sioux City. His name was released by the Diocese of Davenport.

If there are other victims out there, what should they do?

We do not want anyone to suffer in silence. Individuals who have been sexually abused by any priest, at any time, should immediately call 911 or the local authorities, as well as our Victim Assistance Coordinator at 1-866-435-4397 or 712-279-5610. Only then can we take steps to help them heal and prevent other children from being sexually abused.