

DIOCESE OF MARQUETTE
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October 27, 2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Words fall short when attempting to speak about something as sobering and disturbing as the report released earlier today by the Office of the Michigan Attorney General concerning its investigation into clergy sexual abuse in the Diocese of Marquette. However, something must be said, and our work to stamp out this grave evil must continue.

On behalf of the Church, I offer a sincere apology to anyone who has been abused by clergy in the Catholic Church. You are, and should have been, our priority. There is no excuse for what happened to you. It is especially grievous if your voice was not heard. Thank you to those who have courageously come forward to bring light to this darkness which has brought about so much harm.

If you have suffered abuse but have not reported it, please do so. You deserve to be heard, and you deserve healing. God loves you. At the end of this message is information on how to report clergy sexual abuse to the Attorney General's office, and to the diocese. Please be assured that I want you to come forward and be heard.

I renew my pledge to do all that we can to prevent clergy sexual abuse, and to respond quickly and definitively if it should occur. I also renew my pledge to remove from ministry any priest or deacon against whom there is a substantiated allegation of abuse.

Among the processes the Diocese of Marquette has in place to keep children and vulnerable adults safe is training and background checks for employees and volunteers at our churches, schools and other institutions. At the end of September 2022, there were 1,678 priests, deacons, women religious, employees, volunteers and seminarians approved to work and volunteer in our parishes, missions, schools, cemeteries, Catholic Social Services and more in the diocese.

The Attorney General's Report lists allegations without making any determination whether the allegations are credible or substantiated. However, you should know that **no priest or deacon of the Diocese of Marquette with a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor is in active ministry.** In fact, the last alleged incident known to the diocese of sexual abuse of a minor by a priest in active ministry was 25 years ago.

Even though almost all the abuse in our diocese occurred decades ago, the wounds run very deep, and many people are still suffering today. Let us ask the Lord to heal with his tender love all who have been harmed.

As a diocese we have and will continue to cooperate with this investigation. However, the needed renewal of the Church is not brought about by our efforts. While we will steadfastly continue our Safe Environment efforts, we need to open our hearts to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that will bring about the renewal of the Church.

In the course of history when the Church has needed purification, God raised up great saints and cleansed His Church. This is not the time to despair, but for us to be strong in hope and faith that God will do the same in our time.

You may ask, "Is it okay that I'm angry about abuse in the Church?" Yes! But let us also have faith in Jesus' promise to Peter that the "gates of hell shall not prevail against" His Church. Let us also have hope in Jesus' promise: "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." He will not abandon us. He will come to save us.

Let us not lose hope that God will extend his healing love to the victims of clergy sexual abuse. Let us not lose hope that God will purify and renew his Church.

Please help by doing the following:

Pray for the victims of clergy sexual abuse. Pray that God may heal them with his love.

Pray that God may purify and renew the Church.

Love and pray for your priests. Most priests labor in God's vineyard and have dedicated their lives to serving His flock but walk under the dark shadow of those bad shepherds who have harmed the flock.

Report any signs of possible clergy sexual abuse. Refer to the end of this message for information on how to report abuse.

At this point, I would like to address a matter in the report itself. As the Office of the Attorney General noted in the summary, the report is a listing of all the allegations without a determination to their credibility. An allegation of the sexual abuse of a minor was made against Father Mark McQuesten, who is a senior priest active in ministry. It is not a credible allegation.

The allegation was reported to the diocese in 2018 regarding abuse that was alleged to have occurred in 1986 or 1987, over 30 years prior to the reporting of the allegation.

We used the services of an investigator with a background in law enforcement and many years of experience interviewing both victims and perpetrators of sexual crimes. At the conclusion of his investigation, it was his opinion that the allegation was not credible. Subsequently, the reports of the investigation were reviewed by the Independent Review Board, which is primarily comprised of lay persons. The Independent Review Board also advised that the allegation of the sexual abuse of a minor against Father McQuesten was not credible.

The investigation also pointed to boundary violations on the part of Father McQuesten that are said to have occurred in the late 1980s. This information was also shared with the Independent Review Board for them to assist me in assessing Father McQuesten's suitability for ministry.

Though boundary violations are never tolerated, these occurred over three decades ago. Furthermore, we have no evidence that Father McQuesten is a danger to minors.

After the Dallas Charter in 2002, the Diocese of Marquette initiated a robust Safe Environment program to keep children safe. It includes criminal background checks, safe environment awareness training to teach people how to recognize signs of abuse, grooming behaviors and boundary violations. Subsequent to putting this program in place almost 20 years ago, no one has made a report of any boundary violations or grooming behaviors of minors on the part of Father McQuesten.

In addition, we asked the Office of the Attorney General whether they have any evidence that Father McQuesten is a danger to minors. They replied that they did not receive any tips or reports regarding Father McQuesten.

We would clearly act if there were any evidence that Father McQuesten is a danger to minors.

The report also includes information regarding an ex-convict, referred to as ERS, that Father McQuesten allowed to stay on the premises of the parish. This is not an allegation of sexual misconduct on the part of Father McQuesten. Rather, the presence of this individual was causing disruption in the parish, and measures had to be taken to evict him from the premises.

There must be zero tolerance of clergy sexual abuse. Allegations must be taken seriously and investigated. The perpetrators must be brought to justice. All the while we must maintain principles of justice. People are presumed innocent until proven guilty, and everyone deserves a fair trial.

To all those to have been harmed by clergy sexual abuse, I offer again my sincere apology on behalf of the Church. We offer to you the healing love of Jesus Christ. May he come into your life and heal the deep wounds of your heart.

Let us entrust all those who have been harmed by clergy sexual abuse to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and her motherly care. May the ever pure and holy Blessed Virgin Mary wrap her loving arms around them.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ John F. Doerfler". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Most Reverend John F. Doerfler, STD, JCL
Bishop of Marquette

How to Report Abuse

To contact the Michigan Attorney General's Office, call (844) 324-3374 or send an email to: aginvestigations@michigan.gov. The Diocese of Marquette reports all allegations to the appropriate civil authorities, and we encourage you to report to the civil authorities.

To make a report to the Diocese of Marquette, call one of the Victim's Assistance Coordinators: Stephen Lynott at (844) 495-4330 or Diane Tryan at (844) 694-4362 or write: Victim's Assistance Coordinator, c/o Catholic Social Services of the UP, 1100 Ludington St. Suite 401, Escanaba MI 49829. Please mark the letter "Personal and Confidential" and indicate in your letter how you wish to be contacted (by phone or by letter).

The Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting Service (CBAR) has been established to receive reports of sexual abuse and related misconduct by bishops and to relay those reports to proper Church authorities for investigation. To make a report, visit ReportBishopAbuse.org or phone (800) 276-1562. When a report includes a crime, such as the sexual abuse of a minor, it will also be reported to civil authorities. Otherwise, reports will be kept confidential.