

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What information are you releasing? Whose names are on the list?

The list contains names of clergy members against whom a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable person has been received and investigated by the Diocese of Cheyenne. The Diocese is aware of one bishop and ten priests with substantiated allegations. In all cases but one, they were clergy of this Diocese. The one exception is a member of a religious order who committed sexual abuse while serving in the Diocese of Cheyenne.

A “*minor*” is a young person under the age of 18. “*Vulnerable person*” means “any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offence.” (*Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, Pope Francis, May 9, 2019)

### 2. How did you define “child sexual abuse”?

All sexual touching between an adult and a minor or vulnerable person is sexual abuse. But sexual abuse does not have to involve penetration, force, pain or even touching. If an adult engages in any sexual behavior with a minor or vulnerable person in order to meet the adult’s interest or sexual desires even if it does not involve touching, it is sexual abuse. This includes the manufacture, distribution and viewing of child pornography.

For purpose of diocesan policies, the term “sexual abuse” is not necessarily limited to the definitions of sexual abuse under civil or criminal law.

### 3. What do you mean by a substantiated allegation?

A *substantiated allegation* is one which has been determined to have reasonable probability or even certainty based on a convincing level of proof. For a broader description of the term “substantiated allegation,” please see the article by Bishop Steven in this issue of the *Wyoming Catholic Register*.

### 4. Does inclusion on the list imply a criminal offense?

Clergy listed with a substantiated allegation does not necessarily mean they were found guilty of a crime or are liable for civil or criminal claims. Often the determination of a substantiated allegation is independent of any action taken by law enforcement, and it might not have been proven in a civil or ecclesiastical court.

### 5. What happens to an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable person by a member of the clergy once it is received?

The Diocese promptly refers all reports of sexual abuse to civil authorities and child protection agencies as required by applicable state laws and the Diocesan Safe Environment Policy. The Diocese cooperates fully with law enforcement in the process of an investigation. The bishop and other appropriate diocesan officials will also be

notified. Any reasonable allegation of sexual abuse will result in the alleged perpetrator's temporary removal from ministry until an investigation is concluded.

The Diocese may engage the services of an independent investigator, who will take into account the rights of all parties. The Diocesan Review Board examines and evaluates all findings of an investigation and advises the Bishop in his determination of the suitability for ministry of priests and deacons accused of sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable persons.

**6. Are any of the men on this list still in active ministry?**

The diocese has a Zero-tolerance Policy. No cleric, indeed, no employee or volunteer with a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable person serves in public ministry in any way in the Diocese of Cheyenne.

**7. What is the Diocese doing to prevent sexual abuse within the church? What education is provided to clergy, new employees and volunteers?**

The Diocese of Cheyenne has had a Sexual Misconduct Policy in place since 1994 with the latest revision being July, 2018. The Diocese began background checks on clergy and employees in 2001 and implemented the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* in 2003.

In addition, the Diocese continues to create and maintain a comprehensive safe environment program that includes all children and youth and adults: clergy, employees and those volunteers working with minors or vulnerable persons in our parishes and schools.

**For Children and Youth:** All students in grades K-12 in Catholic schools and religious education programs are required to receive safe environment education. This is not sex education. Students are taught about personal safety, awareness and boundaries.

**For Adults:** The following requirements must be met prior to employment or volunteer service for those who interact with minors or vulnerable persons:

- Safe environment education
- State and national background checks, repeated at least every five years
- Acknowledge that they have received, have read, and will follow:
  - ✓ *Norms for Responding to Reports of Sexual Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults*
  - ✓ *Instructions Concerning Interactions with Minors and Vulnerable Adults*

In addition, The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops engages an independent firm that conducts an annual safe environment audit to ensure compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. The diocese has been found in full compliance with the *Charter* yearly.

As a consequence, there have been no substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of minors against a priest serving in the Diocese of Cheyenne to have occurred after since 2003.

**8. What steps has the Diocese taken to ensure that those who apply for seminary are suitable for ministry?**

The application process for admission to seminary studies for the Diocese of Cheyenne includes interviews, multiple references, national criminal background and national sex offender registry checks and a psychological assessment that includes a psychosexual evaluation. Only a man capable of living a chaste and celibate life required of him moves forward in the application process. While in seminary, men are closely supervised by a formation team and routinely evaluated by the Diocese. The formation integrates the human, pastoral, spiritual and intellectual dimensions of the *Program of Priestly Formation*. This training for our priests is an important responsibility that we observe with the utmost seriousness.

**9. How does the Diocese ensure that priests or deacons from other dioceses or religious communities, ministering here either short or long-term, are not a threat?**

Prior to being allowed to minister in the Diocese, every cleric from outside of the Diocese must provide a letter from his bishop or religious superior stating that he is a cleric in good standing and suitable for ministry. He must have completed safe environment training under the provisions of the *Charter for the Protection for Children and Young People*. Bishops and/or religious superiors must attest that there is nothing in his background that would render him unsuitable for ministering; especially with children and young persons.

**10. If a cleric who has a substantiated allegation performed a sacrament for me (Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage, etc.), is that sacrament considered valid? In other words, did it “count”?**

Even if a bishop, priest or deacon has been removed because of a substantiated allegation (under restrictions or dismissal from the clerical state), sacraments that he administered are valid. A sacrament is a personal, saving action of Jesus Christ. However worthy or unworthy that ordained person may be, the sacrament is valid as long as the cleric was validly ordained.