



# DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Contact:

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**The Diocese of Grand Rapids' Office of Communications issues the following statement in response to the announcement by the Michigan Department of the Attorney General regarding an investigation into the Catholic Church in Michigan.**

The Diocese of Grand Rapids welcomes and will fully cooperate with the Department of the Attorney General. We welcome them to join us in our efforts of inviting survivors to come forward, a practice that has been in place since 2002. We believe this investigation will help to restore the trust of Catholics throughout our 11 counties.

The Diocese of Grand Rapids is and has been committed to the protection of children. Consistent with the [Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People](#), the diocese has had the following policies and procedures in place for the last 16 years - since 2002 - to ensure that our parishes and schools are the safest places possible for children:

- The diocese maintains a zero-tolerance policy for anyone in the Church who has abused a minor or vulnerable adult.
- Every allegation — even those made against a deceased member of the clergy or reported long after the criminal statute of limitations has run out— is immediately turned over to the appropriate county prosecutor.
- The diocese has a dedicated victim assistance coordinator to conduct the intake of allegations, arrange for counseling and other support needed, and to encourage survivors to exercise their right to make a report to the public authorities.
- Every allegation against an active clergy member is turned over to our Diocesan Review Board, even if the prosecutor cannot or will not act. Our Diocesan Review Board is comprised of two clergy members and seven lay members, including a retired judge, a retired FBI agent, psychologists, a social worker and an educator. The Review Board has the power to gather evidence, interview witnesses, and prepare a final report. Additional details are available in the [diocesan policy on sexual abuse of minors](#).
- The Diocese of Grand Rapids has participated in annual charter compliance audits by outside auditors since their inception in 2003 and has passed every single year. Audit report summaries are available [here](#).
- The Diocese of Grand Rapids will temporarily remove from ministry any member of the clergy who is under investigation for a credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult. The name of a clergy member who is permanently removed from ministry is publicly released, and an announcement is made at the parishes or other locations where that clergy



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member served. In both instances, the diocese encourages other survivors to come forward and report additional allegations.

- All members of our clergy, volunteers, staff members, and teachers must complete the following requirements to be around children:
  - Attend a certified safe environment training program. This is an educational program conducted by certified facilitators that makes participants aware of the signs of child abuse, the methods and means by which offenders commit abuse, and the steps taken to prevent child sexual abuse, including reporting. To [register for a class](#), visit the diocesan website.
  - Agree to compliance with the [Standards for Ministerial Behavior](#).
  - Undergo criminal history background checks. Certain staff members must also be fingerprinted.
- Since 2002, the Diocese of Grand Rapids has held VIRTUS® training sessions in which more than 23,000 clergy, volunteers, staff members, teachers, and others have been trained to identify and report the abuse of minors. In this past fiscal year alone, 65 sessions were held.

These practices and policies have been proven to work. The last reported case of clergy abuse in the Diocese of Grand Rapids was prior to 2002.

We look forward to sharing how we have implemented these policies and procedures with the Department of the Attorney General and ensuring that best practices are in place. We also welcome the department's review of how we have handled past abuse allegations.

As always, the Diocese of Grand Rapids encourages anyone who has been sexually abused as a minor by a priest, deacon or church employee, or who has knowledge of any such offense against a minor or vulnerable adult to contact the appropriate civil authority or the diocese's victim assistance coordinator at 616-243-0491. There is no timeframe for bringing forth such a complaint.

We pray that this investigation will help to continue the healing process for survivors of sexual abuse.

*The Diocese of Grand Rapids serves more than 191,000 Catholics, 80 parishes and 31 schools in an 11-county area of West Michigan. For additional information visit our website [www.dioceseofgrandrapids.org](http://www.dioceseofgrandrapids.org). Connect with the diocese on [Facebook](#) (Diocese of Grand Rapids), [Twitter](#) (@GRDiocese), and [Instagram](#) (@GRDiocese).*

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