



Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama

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Bishop's Statement on Clerical Sexual Abuse of Minors

Today I am providing information about accusations of clergy sexual abuse of minors. The credibility of the accusations is either the result of an admission by the former priest, substantial evidence that we have gathered, or an independent investigation that substantiated the claims.

The priests named were ministering in this diocese when they committed these deplorable acts. What they did, not only to the victims themselves but their families and friends, is inexcusable. In so many ways it has injured the very foundation of our Church family. Although there is nothing that one can say to right these wrongs, please know that we have spent a great deal of time and effort to see that such situations will not happen again. It is with heartfelt sorrow that I ask forgiveness of all the victims of these terrible crimes and of their family members who suffered as well.

I want to take this opportunity to let you know what our diocese has been doing these past years in order to protect those most vulnerable.

What have we done?

Since the bishops met in Dallas in 2002 our Diocesan Review Board, Victim's Coordinator and Youth Protection Program have been hard at work reviewing allegations, tending to those who may be victims, and awareness training of over 35,000 men and women in the diocese. We have performed thousands of background checks of those who may come in contact with children. We have reviewed any and all allegations against priests, deacons, teachers and lay volunteers. We have reported to the proper authorities any incidents in accordance with state law.

Specifically, what did the diocese do after the Dallas meeting?

In 2002 Bishop David Foley, my predecessor, responded to the national sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church by consulting with local, state and national experts. These experts were in the fields of child advocacy, child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health,

and other related disciplines. Bishop Foley sought to educate himself and his staff in all areas of child sexual abuse and exploitation through this multidisciplinary approach.

Bishop Foley visited the National Children's Advocacy Center based in Huntsville. There he solicited the help of the Center in developing a diocesan response to identify victims, provide care to victims, develop policies to prevent abuse, and create a review board to oversee the diocesan efforts to address past, present, and future issues.

The bishop enlisted the help of the Executive Director of the Center to lead the effort. Ms. Connie Carnes became the first chair of the Diocesan Review Board. She was assisted by the Center's Training Director, Ms. Jan Payne. The Board membership was then expanded to include a child welfare social worker who had written to Bishop Foley about the crisis in the Church, a leading mental health professional, a psychiatrist with the state Mental Health Department, and one of the juvenile justice leaders who later became a justice on the Alabama Supreme Court.

Many of you may recall that Bishop Foley began his public response to the crisis with "listening sessions" that were open to the public and media. At the listening sessions he sat in front of the altar before the Blessed Sacrament to let people address him with their stories, their complaints, and their recommendations. He also held private meetings in the church if requested.

As people came forward at the listening sessions and later through letters, emails and phone calls, the bishop addressed each directly with the Victim's Assistance Coordinator, Al Manzella, who had worked for years with the Alabama Department of Human Resources. Every allegation of child sexual abuse, whether involving a priest, deacon, teacher or lay volunteer was given to the Review Board which, following an independent investigation by a licensed, professional investigator, made their recommendations to the bishop. This is the process that we follow to this day.

Below you will find our best judgment regarding those clergy accused of committing acts of child abuse while working in our diocese. None of these individuals are in service in this or any other diocese.

Charles V. Cross (Deceased: 2010)

Ordained: 1960 (Mobile-Birmingham); Served from 1969 in the new Diocese of Birmingham
Removed from ministry in parishes 1985; Forced to retire without privileges in 2002

John J. (Jack) Ventura

Ordained: 1968 (Patterson, New Jersey); 1974 Incardinated in Diocese of Birmingham
Removed from ministry after allegations received in 1985

Charles Bordenca (Deceased: 2017)

Ordained 1955 (Mobile-Birmingham); Served from 1969 in the new Diocese of Birmingham
Removed from active ministry in this diocese in 1989

Kevin Cooke

Ordained: 1978

Removed from ministry in 2002

Jonathan (John) Franklin (Deceased 1986) (Benedictine)

Ordained: 1956 (Louisiana)

Removed from ministry: mid 1980s

Roger Lott (Deceased 2011) (Benedictine)

Ordained: 1954 (Mobile-Birmingham)

Removed from ministry: 1997

We believe this to be an accurate list. That being said, we encourage anyone who may have new information to come forward. To report suspected child abuse that involves a priest, deacon, or someone connected to a church, school or other institution within this diocese please contact Deacon Frank Slapikas at (205) 242-3954 or our general counsel, John F. Whitaker at (205) 776-7118.

We will not tolerate such sexual abuse. We condemn it. We will continue to remain vigilant. We invite those who wish to participate in any of our programs to contact us. Your help will be greatly appreciated. Finally, we will continue to pray for all those affected in any way. We pray that individuals will have the courage to come forward with their stories and seek help with the pain they may still be suffering. May God guide our efforts to protect all those committed to our care.



+ Robert J. Baker

Bishop of the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama