



Contact: Susan O'Brien
Director of Communications and
Development
susano@scdiocese.org
(712) 233-7513

1821 Jackson Street † PO Box 3379 † Sioux City, IA 51105
(712) 255-7933 † www.scdiocese.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: STATEMENT FROM THE DIOCESE OF SIOUX CITY

We are well aware of and understand the public, our parishioners' and victims' dismay at the information released in the Associated Press (AP) article dated October 31, 2018 regarding Jerry Coyle. We know that the AP reporter is now investigating all of our past and present actions at the Diocese of Sioux City, in order to create his next story. We are researching old records with the Review Board, an advisory board made up of lay people in the Diocese, including licensed therapists, a judge, nurses, police officers, and a psychiatrist, who advise the Bishop in his assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors and in his determination of suitability for ministry; offer advice on all aspects of these cases; and make recommendations they deem appropriate to reduce the risk to children. The issue that is most important for the public to understand is that many of the allegations made in the past, prior to the 2002 *"Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People"* were not followed up with an investigation by civil authorities. The Church often sent priests to treatment, in hopes that any actions of misconduct could be cured. We know now that is not the way to handle any allegation of sexual misconduct, and with the 2002 *Charter* to guide us, we have protocols in place to follow, which we do. When victims report as adults, the statute of limitations often has passed, meaning that the alleged abuser priest could not be prosecuted, even if the allegation from the past is deemed credible. This makes it very difficult to know what to do with priests that have allegations made against them, but no prosecution by civil authorities, and no incarceration for the alleged crime.

It should be noted that after the 2002 *Charter* we asked the Woodbury County Attorney and other county attorneys to come in and look through priest records. At that time, they declined for various reasons including: because the statute of limitations had passed, and many of the priests accused were dead.

Bishop Nickless inherited many issues from the past. These are the ones we are dealing with today. One of the most difficult issues is this: where do we put known alleged abuser priests that are still alive, but have no charges against them? What do we do with these men? We know that you do not want them in your community. Many care facilities will not, or cannot, take them. Their families sometimes will take them in, but not always. They cannot go to a prison, as civil authorities say that the statute of limitations has run out to prosecute them. This leaves us with very few choices. We understand that the many members of the public are anxious and fearful about sex offenders, because the crime is so egregious. However, if they are not charged and sent to prison, there are few options for housing them.

Therefore, we are working on a list of credibly accused priests in our Diocese, and we ask you to come forward if you are, or your child is or was a victim, of sexual abuse by any priest in our Diocese. All of the information in our possession will be used to create the list. If you have been victimized by a priest in our Diocese at any time, make a report with our Victims Assistance Coordinator, and get it on the books, so that we know we have researched all of the priests that should be on the list. **The number to call is: 1-866-435-4397 or 712-279-5610.** It cannot be said enough that we are truly sorry for the pain victims have, do, and will face throughout

their lives. We are sorry for the families who have, do, and will continue to suffer with this pain. We want to do what is right to help you now and we plead with you to come forward and tell your story, so that we can have it on record.

In the past year, we received an allegation against a priest that he touched a girl's leg. Diocesan officials followed all of the protocols set in place by the *2002 Charter*. He was removed immediately from pastoral ministry, and civil authorities were notified. However, the county attorney did not pursue the case at this time. Relatives of this accused priest have taken him into their home for the present time.

There have been inquiries regarding Bishop Soens, who had past allegations of misconduct from the Diocese of Davenport. These allegations were made by adults, who alleged past misconduct. No charges were filed, but the Diocese of Davenport did pay settlements to these claimants. When the Diocese of Sioux City was notified of these allegations, Soens was ordered by the Holy Father to live a life of prayer and penance. He is now 92 and resides at Holy Spirit Retirement Home in Sioux City. This is public knowledge and this has never been hidden by the Diocese of Sioux City. There have been no allegations of sexual misconduct made against Soens since he has been with of the Diocese of Sioux City.

As far as Jerry Coyle, he has had no criminal charges made against him. He self-admitted, and there was not one allegation until 1986, and this individual was an adult, so the statute of limitations had run out. We recognize that when Coyle self-admitted, each parish should have been notified, and we should have asked victims to come forward. We apologize that this did not happen under the leadership of the Diocese of Sioux City at that time. As far as payments made to Coyle, these were benefits he accrued from his pension, and that is what he is entitled to by law. He returned to the Diocese this past summer, because of his poor health and his living situation in New Mexico was not a good option. The placement at Marian Home in Fort Dodge was not handled well, as the public should have been alerted. In hindsight, this should not have happened, and he is no longer there. Although Coyle is a self-admitted offender, he is not on the sex offender registry, but we will keep authorities aware of his whereabouts going forward.

Local Bishops do not have the authority to "defrock" a priest, properly known as laicization. Laicization is a complicated process that is handled by the Vatican; however, a Bishop can remove a priest's ability to function as a priest, and this has been done. Additionally, once laicized, Diocesan officials lose all ability to supervise formerly accused clergy.

The Diocese of Sioux City does follow the Charter's guidelines for all claims of abuse in the present day. As we follow up on past cases, we want to do that in a way that helps victims to feel that they have some peace and justice. We set up a meeting on December 6, 2018 with the Attorney General of Iowa to discuss matters further. A list of credibly accused priests will be published, as soon as we know we have all of the information we need to move forward.