COLUMBUS PRIEST CREDIBLY ACCUSED OF ABUSE OF A MINOR

COLUMBUS – As part of the Diocese’s continued investigation of allegations of sexual abuse of a minor, the Most Reverend Robert J. Brennan, Bishop of Columbus, has added retired Diocesan priest David Schilder, 77, to the lists of priests credibly accused of sexual abuse of a minor.

This action and announcement are made in accordance with the Catholic Church’s Charter and Norms for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Diocese’s published Policies for Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Minors and Response to Allegations Thereof.

In July 2004, the Diocese of Columbus received a partial and incomplete report of possible sexual abuse of a minor regarding Father Schilder. The report did not provide specifics relating to the alleged conduct but indicated that the alleged conduct occurred in 1968. Because of the incompleteness of the report, no determination as to credibility was possible at that time, and no process to remove Father Schilder from the priesthood could be initiated. Nevertheless, the allegation was reported to Franklin County Children Services on July 16, 2004. Subsequently, Father Schilder retired for health reasons and was instructed not to engage in public ministry as a priest.

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On September 16, 2019, a second accusation of sexual abuse of a minor, allegedly occurring sometime during the 1981 to 1983 time period, was reported to the Diocesan Victim’s Assistance Coordinator. Diocesan officials promptly reported the allegation to the Columbus Police, notified Father Schilder of the allegation, and commissioned an independent third party investigation of the allegation. The investigators interviewed both the alleged victim and Father Schilder, who denied ever sexually abusing a minor.

On November 20, 2019, a meeting of the Diocesan Board of Review for the Protection of Children was convened to assess the results of the investigation and make a recommendation to the Bishop as to whether the allegations against Father Schilder appeared to be credible. The Review Board found the allegations credible and made a recommendation to the Bishop that Father Schilder’s name be added to the list of priests credibly accused. Bishop Brennan has accepted that recommendation and has placed Father Schilder on administrative leave pending further canonical and administrative processes.

Plans are under way to set up outreach in the Diocese, and more information will be provided to parishioners in the Diocese in the near future. Additionally, Bishop Brennan has directed that the third party investigators who investigated the allegations against Father Schilder continue their investigation to ensure that anyone who may have been abused by Father Schilder is identified and their needs addressed. The Diocese will report the results of its investigation to the proper local authorities and will cooperate with local law enforcement in any way requested.

Father Schilder began serving as a priest of the Diocese of Columbus in 1968. His assignments have included: Assistant Pastor, Holy Rosary Parish, Columbus (1968-1969); Assistant Pastor, St. Timothy Parish, Columbus (1969-1970); Teacher, Bishop Ready High School, Columbus (1969-1970); Chaplain, Chillicothe Correctional Institution (1970-1976);
Assistant Pastor, St. Agnes Parish, Columbus (1976-1977); Associate Director of Catholic Cemeteries, with residence at St. Joseph Cemetery (1977-1978); Director of Catholic Cemeteries (1978-1984); Chaplain, Central Ohio Council, Boy Scouts of America (1973-1975); Orient Correctional Institution, with residence at Corpus Christi Parish, Columbus (1985-86), later in residence, St. Ladislas Parish, Columbus (1986-1997); Chaplain, Elkton Federal Correction Institution, with residence at St. Paul Parish, Salem, Ohio, Youngstown Diocese (1997-2001) and Chaplain, Ashland Federal Correction Institution, Ashland, Kentucky (2001-2004).

The Diocese of Columbus encourages anyone who may have experienced sexual abuse by clergy or others associated with the Church to notify law enforcement immediately and also the Diocesan Victim’s Assistance Coordinator at 614-224-2251, 866-448-0217, or helpisavailable@columbuscatholic.org. Forms for reporting abuse are available in Catholic parish and school offices and can be accessed from the diocesan website (www.columbuscatholic.org).

Although significant progress has been made since implementing the Catholic Church’s Charter and Norms for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Diocese’s published Policies for Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Minors and Response to Allegations Thereof in 2002, Bishop Brennan believes that additional steps are necessary to confirm that all allegations of sexual abuse, no matter how long ago they occurred, have been properly identified, investigated, and where confirmed the necessary reconciliation and healing measures are made available to the victims and their families. To that end, Bishop Brennan has retained attorney Thomas Bonasera of the Dinsmore & Shohl law firm to conduct an independent third party audit of Diocesan clergy personnel files.

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The audit will specifically involve a review of all clergy files to determine that the Diocese’s list of credibly accused priests is complete. Mr. Bonasera is past president of both the Ohio State Bar and Columbus Bar Associations.

Additionally, Bishop Brennan has commissioned a task force to perform a complete review of safe environment policies and procedures as well as its outreach efforts within the Diocese, charging them with the mission to ensure that the Diocese is doing its utmost to provide healing and assistance and that no one affected by the crisis of sexual abuse of children and young people in the Church suffers in silence and isolation. The Task Force’s is expected to provide a report for Bishop Brennan’s review by January 31, 2020.