

**PulledQuote:** “Once again, I ask forgiveness of those who have been harmed by abuse in the Church. You are our brothers and sisters, and your suffering brings sorrow to us all. I thank you for courageously coming forward, and I pray that the healing mercy of God will be with you.” – Bishop John Folda

**Headline: A time for healing**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Several months ago I stated my intention to release the names of those clergy and religious in the Diocese of Fargo who have substantiated allegations of abuse of minors. After a thorough review of our files going back to 1950, I have released those names. This includes our own diocesan clergy, as well as clergy from other dioceses and members of religious communities who have ministered in the Diocese of Fargo. Even one instance of abuse would be too many, and I know this list of clergy and religious is a cause of deep sadness to us all.

I first ask forgiveness for the shameful acts of those clergy who caused harm to young people and abused the trust placed in them by God and by the faithful. No excuse can be made for these actions, nor does this release of names fully address the pain of victims of abuse. I pray for the healing of those who have suffered such abuse, and I ask all the faithful of our diocese to join me in this prayer. Some have asked why it is necessary to publish this list of names when nearly all of these cases are from years long past. I believe it is necessary to acknowledge these sins in the history of the diocese, especially since they were committed by those who represented the Church to the faithful. I also want all victims of abuse to know that their stories are heard and taken seriously. As a family of faith, we must stand with our brothers and sisters who have been hurt and support them in their healing.

It is also my hope that this release of names will open the way to a purification of our Church, especially in our own diocese. We all know the experience of grace that comes with the confession of sins, and I pray that our diocese will experience a similar outpouring of grace through acknowledgement of these sinful acts by those in positions of authority. It has been said that we must understand our past in order to move forward into the future, and the Church likewise must acknowledge this dark stain in its past so that it can be purified and move ahead with God’s grace.

Another purpose of this release is to assure the faithful that no member of the clergy with a substantiated allegation of abuse of a minor is currently in ministry in the Diocese of Fargo. Sexual abuse of any kind, especially of a minor, is intolerable and incompatible with ministry in the Church. As the bishop of this diocese, I am committed to the protection and safety of all who come into contact with our Church, especially children and young people. To that end, we follow all civil laws regarding the reporting of suspected abuse of a minor.

Since 2002 the Diocese of Fargo has also adhered to the requirements of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, sometimes called the Dallas Charter. This commitment requires the permanent removal from ministry of any Church worker who sexually abuses a minor. It also entails safe environment training and background checks for all clergy, employees, and volunteers in the diocese. We remain committed to offering assistance to all victims of abuse by clergy, and I am willing to meet with them personally if they wish. We will continue to take seriously every allegation of abuse that is brought to our attention, and I encourage victims to come forward so that we might offer assistance and the assurance of our support in their suffering.

It has become clear that the abuse of minors is a plague in our entire society. It is not only a Catholic issue, nor is it only a clergy issue. But we as a Church must acknowledge and address this tragedy in our own house and do all we can to eradicate it. The Church and her shepherds must never become complacent and assume that the problem of abuse has been solved. We will remain vigilant for the sake of our young people, always striving to assure the safety of all God’s children.

I want to acknowledge the important role of our Diocesan Review Board in this difficult process. These lay experts in child services, counseling, medicine, psychiatry, and law have been immensely

helpful in the review and evaluation of these allegations. None of them are employed by the diocese, and so they are able to bring an objective external view to these cases. They have assisted me not only with this file review, but also with every similar case that has come to my attention. I am very grateful to them for the generous gift of their expertise, their time, and their honesty.

While this list of clergy and religious is considered complete for now, it is not a closed list. If additional information comes to my attention, and other names must be added to the list, we will do so. I am encouraged that there have been very few substantiated cases of abuse in recent decades, but once again, we cannot be complacent or lower our guard. Those serving in the Church have worked hard in recent years to give training and provide a safe environment for all who come to us, and I am grateful for these efforts. I must also give credit to the vast majority of our clergy and religious who have served the faithful of this diocese with integrity, zeal, and holiness. Despite the sins of some, we are blessed by the selfless service of so many others who have dedicated themselves to God and his Church. And even when facing the darkness of sin, we can always depend on the redeeming power of God's grace.

Once again, I ask forgiveness of those who have been harmed by abuse in the Church. You are our brothers and sisters, and your suffering brings sorrow to us all. I thank you for courageously coming forward, and I pray that the healing mercy of God will be with you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+John T. Folda  
Bishop of Fargo