



Diocese of Ogdensburg

Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley

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My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I want to give you a brief update on the lawsuits filed against the Diocese of Ogdensburg under the Child Victims Act. Last Friday marked the close of the “window legislation” which suspended the statute of limitations and allowed individuals to file lawsuits alleging sexual abuse no matter when the alleged abuse occurred.

During the two-year window 122 lawsuits have been filed against the Diocese. These lawsuits allege abuse from the 1940’s, 50’s, 60’s 70’s, 80’s and 90’s. There is only one case that alleges abuse in the last 25 years, after we put into place more rigorous safe environment policies. Our response to these claims has remained constant. We apologize to and seek to compensate those who were victimized by sexual abuse. These lawsuits are in the hands of our attorneys, and we will seek to resolve them fairly and promptly.

While many of the lawsuits state claims that may be meritorious, the Diocese is also named as a defendant in cases claiming abuse by priests, teachers, men and women consecrated religious, and scout leaders over whom we had no control. As you might expect, there also are some lawsuits where we believe the evidence will show that the accused individual did not commit the abuse alleged. We have a few cases that do not name the offender but simply allege general abuse. We will do our best to see that all claims are resolved on their merits.

We remain committed to our safe environment policies and practices. We have implemented background checks and safe environment training to protect children and prevent abuse from taking place. All allegations of abuse are reported to civil officials, the accused is confronted with the allegation, the matter is investigated and is reviewed by an independent lay Review Board, and any credibly accused clergy is removed from ministry. We have a Victim Assistance Coordinator who offers counseling and assistance to victims. We remain vigilant, working to prevent abuse from happening.

While it is impossible to predict the financial impact of the lawsuits, the impact will likely be significant. These lawsuits will pose significant challenges to us, but we are committed to continuing our mission. We are working with our insurance companies and hope that a significant contribution to the settlement of these claims will come from insurance.

The past two years have been a challenge for victims and their families, for our priests, consecrated religious and parishioners. Added to the filing of these lawsuits was the anxiety and hardships caused by the Coronavirus and the pandemic emergency. I want to thank and commend the clergy and faithful of our diocese for your perseverance and generosity during this trying time. I ask you to continue to support your parishes and the work of the diocese. We must continue our mission in good times and in bad. Your continued support is essential.

Please continue to pray for victims of sexual abuse, and for our diocese in the days ahead. We will keep you advised as we move forward in an attempt to resolve these lawsuits while continuing to serve the needs of the people of the North Country. Asking God to bless you abundantly, I am

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ *Terry R. LaValley*

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Bishop of Ogdensburg