News



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The Diocese of Saginaw, Michigan, has named an independent delegate to lead its investigation into child abuse in the diocese, while also releasing the names of several priests who have been defrocked for accusations in their past.

Saginaw Bishop Joseph Cistone appeared at a press conference April 13 along with Michigan Appeals Court Chief Judge Michael Talbot, to announce Talbot's appointment to oversee the diocese's handling of sex abuse cases.

The diocese also announced that former priests Stanislaus Bur, John Hammer, Jack Leipert and Leonard Wilkuski, as well as former deacon Richard Howard, were all "permanently removed from ministry due to credible allegations of sexual abuse of minors." Bur died in 2009.

The diocese provided lists of past assignments for each of the former clerics it named.

According to the diocese's website, "Talbot will oversee procedures and responses to the sexual abuse of minors — and sexual misconduct issues — involving clergy and other diocesan representatives. He will establish specific roles and responsibilities for diocesan representatives including communications to the general public, as well as official responses to media inquiries, and will take the lead on any and all interaction with civil authorities."

Talbot, 72, will assume his duties immediately after his retirement on April 25, which will mark the end of a 40-year career on the bench.

"I intend to get to work right away," Talbot said at the press conference. "I'm confident I can help the Diocese of Saginaw work towards the fresh start needed."

"I need to hear from those who have hesitated to come forward," he also said.

Talbot was quickly contradicted by the Saginaw County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, who said in a statement provided to local television station WNEM following the press conference that "The Diocese cannot and should not be used as a clearing house for the reporting of crimes by victims. That is the function of law enforcement. Any victims of abuse or other crimes should report their allegations directly to law enforcement as opposed to the Diocese or Judge Talbot, its independent delegate."

The diocese responded with another statement April 16, which quoted Talbot as saying "I intend to comply with the mandatory requirements of The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People adopted by the Catholic bishops of the United States."

The charter requires dioceses "to report an allegation of sexual abuse of a person who is a minor to the public authorities."

The Saginaw Diocese has been struggling with reports of child abuse by priests and communication with law enforcement over the last two months.

Saginaw priest Fr. Robert DeLand, who had been investigated by the diocese for a previous complaint in 2005, was arrested in late February following an undercover sting involving a minor. The diocese later received an allegation against Fr. Ronald Dombrowski.

Both priests were placed on administrative leave. DeLand was arrested again in early April.

Local law enforcement said it was investigating other child abuse cases and had received tips against other area priests. In March, police raided the diocesan offices, cathedral rectory and even the bishop's home, claiming that the diocese had not been cooperative with their investigation.

The diocese said at the time that it would cooperate with investigators going forward.

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