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The Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese's release of the names of priests and deacons credibly accused of sexual abuse of a minor "is an appropriate step and part of a commitment to openness and transparency by the church in this area," said a member of the Diocesan Review Board.

"I am hopeful too that it will bring some solace and healing to the victims and their families," said Donald Schmid in a Sept. 19 statement, a day after the diocese released the list.

Since 2002, the diocese has had in place "robust procedures and processes to keep children and vulnerable adults safe," he added. "More than 17,000 people who work or volunteer with children in the Diocese or Diocesan schools have received safe environment training and criminal background checks. The Catholic Church and its schools are safe places for children today."

In August, Bishop Kevin Rhoades announced he would release the names, saying that it was important for victims to see the names of their abusers made public "for all to see, for everyone to know the pain caused by these priests."

"It is my hope that by releasing these names, the innocent victims of these horrific and heartbreaking crimes can finally begin the process of healing," Rhoades said at an Aug. 17 news conference.

He reiterated the diocese's commitment to protect children and young people saying, "We must be vigilant in our efforts to protect our youth. With the Lord's guidance and love, we will do so."

The list of the names of priests and deacons who have served in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend and have been credibly accused of at least one act of sexual abuse of a minor consists of: James Blume, Michael Buescher, Brian Carsten, William Ehrman, William Gieranowski, John Gillig, Gabriel Hernandez, Edward Krason, Thomas Lombardi, Robert Mahoney, Eldon Miller, Edward Paquette, James Seculoff, Richard Stieglitz, and Richard Thompson, as well as Paul LeBrun Cornelius Ryan, and James Trepanier of the Congregation of the Holy Cross..

A news release said the list was developed with the assistance of the Diocesan Review Board, which was established to assist the bishop in complying with the requirements of the U.S. bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" and the "Essential Norms" for implementing the charter.

For the purposes of this list, the diocese said, a "credible accusation" against a priest or deacon is one that, after a thorough investigation and review of available information, appears more likely true than not in the judgment of the review board and is accepted as credible by the bishop.

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The Diocesan Review Board is comprised of mostly laypeople and its members assess all allegations of sexual abuse of minors by priests and deacons presented in this diocese. In determining credibility for the purpose of the list, Rhoades followed the recommendations of the Diocesan Review Board.

"Bishop Rhoades has demonstrated great sensitivity and care for victims of sexual abuse and has carried out a zero-tolerance policy for priests credibly accused of sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults," said Schmid.

He said it has been his experience in serving on the board that the bishop "has promptly and in all cases removed from public ministry and pursued canon law sanctions against priests under his authority where the allegations and available evidence warrant such removal and sanctions."

Schmid noted that the published list involved priests and deacons who committed abuse prior to 2002, "although victims continue to step forward courageously to report abuse from that era. … We will be ever on guard to prevent and forthrightly deal with any alleged current incidents of abuse."