News



by Catholic News Service

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The bishops of Virginia's two Catholic dioceses said in a joint statement Oct. 24 that they wanted to assure Catholics in the state and the public "we are cooperating with the attorney general's office."

Earlier the same day, Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring announced his office is investigating allegations of child sexual abuse by clergy in Virginia.

"Any instance of child sexual abuse is intolerable and gravely immoral," said the statement from Arlington Bishop Michael Burbidge and Richmond Bishop Barry Knestout. "We hope that this process will bring healing for all victims and confirm our commitment to accountability and justice."

"Having met with victims," they continued, "we know that such abuse is unforgettable, and many carry that burden with them throughout their lives. We continue to welcome the opportunity to meet personally with victims, to hear their stories, and to support them in their journey toward healing."

The statement was released by both dioceses and posted on their respective websites: https://www.arlingtondiocese.org and https://richmonddiocese.org.

Burbidge and Knestout said that before they were contacted by Herring, both of their dioceses had already begun "internal investigative processes using

independent investigators tasked with reviewing all diocesan clergy files."

"We promised to publish a list of all priests and deacons against whom credible and substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of a minor have been made, and we renew that promise," they said. "We will continue these efforts and ensure it does not impede the attorney general’s investigation."

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In keeping with the U.S. bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," officials in the diocese report every allegation of sexual abuse of a minor to legal authorities, the bishops said.

"Each accusation is also brought before a Diocesan Review Board, composed mostly of laypeople," they added. "We thoroughly vet clergy and staff and train them to identify suspicious behavior and report any allegation of sexual abuse of a minor. Volunteers who interact with children also go through this process."

Burbidge and Knestout urged anyone who is aware of misconduct or abuse on the part of clergy or staff of either diocese to notify legal authorities and utilize the hotline established by the attorney general: http://www.virginiaclergyhotline.com.

They also directed people to the victim assistance coordinator in each diocese. The coordinators can help victims/survivors make a formal complaint of abuse to the diocese, arrange a personal meeting with the bishop or his representative, and to obtain support for the needs of the individual and families, they said.