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The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Nov. 29 released the names of clergy who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse of minors.

The diocese said the release of names pertains to the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," approved by the U.S. bishops in 2002, and the diocese's own policy on sexual abuse in place since 1985.

The list dates back to approximately 1950, the period for which there are reasonably reliable files, a diocesan statement said. More than 2,000 files were reviewed, containing tens of thousands of documents. The list has been posted on the diocesan website, dwc.org.

The release of the list is part of the Wheeling-Charleston Diocese's "ongoing commitment to transparency in addition to helping aid in the process of reconciliation and healing for the faithful of West Virginia."

"We hope the release of this list will be one of many steps taken to restore trust with parishioners and the broader community in West Virginia," said Baltimore Archbishop William Lori, who is apostolic administrator of the diocese.

"We hope people see the release of this list as a sign of good faith that the diocese is committed to transparency, accountability and to providing a safe environment for

children and adults," he said in a statement. "As we continue to pray for all victims of sexual abuse, let us also recommit ourselves to do everything we can to ensure the protection of all who are entrusted to our care."

The list includes the names of 18 credibly accused clergy from the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston and 13 credibly accused priests from other regions or dioceses who have served within the statewide West Virginia diocese but for whom no claims have been filed in the diocese.

A news release from the diocese explained that a "credible" accusation means there is reasonable cause to believe that an offense has occurred considering all factors — time, place, age of the parties, background and history available, personnel files and any other pertinent facts.

The list does not include those cases where an accusation was not credible — meaning an accusation which, after review by law enforcement and/or other civil, lay, and church officials, was not supported by evidence or there is no reasonable probability that the accused committed sexual abuse of a child.

The diocesan statement said the released list does not differentiate between criminal or noncriminal misconduct committed by priests of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston; rather it refers specifically to violations of the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

"Some of the claims do not involve criminal conduct as determined by public authorities or do not involve actual physical contact with the victims, such as soliciting, nonetheless, they are considered violations of the charter," it said. "The list does not purport to address matters that might involve immorality or illegality that were not sex abuse cases involving minors, that is those under age 18."

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The diocesan statement said the list was developed with the assistance of outside counsel and was reviewed by the Diocesan Lay Review Board to include an in-depth examination of the facts and documentation for each case.

The review board is comprised of lay members with an array of professional experience, including child and adolescent health care, the treatment of abuse

survivors, and human resources. Board members volunteer and function independently of the diocese.

The statement added, "Although this list is exhaustive and comprehensive as it relates to the charter at this time and in its present form, the diocese reserves the right to update the list should more information become available as time goes on."

"This list undoubtedly reveals the failings of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to fully protect young people within the church," Lori said. "Rightly, many have a cause for anger and pain. I offer my sincerest apologies to all victims of sexual abuse and vow to strive to take proper action to ensure the safety of children and others in our care.

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston said it "remains committed to the protection of children and young people."

A hotline — (833) 230-5656 — has been created to aid anyone who wishes to report cases of sexual abuse by clergy, staff or volunteers in the diocese.

The diocese encourages anyone who may be a victim of any abuse by any member of the church to contact local civil authorities and the Office of Safe Environment for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston by calling the new hotline.

It said all calls to the hotline will be answered by staff members equipped to properly document details of abuse and direct callers to victim's assistance if required.