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Iowa's attorney general has asked the state's Catholic dioceses for documents and any other records pertaining to clergy sex abuse in their localities and to comply with the request by Aug. 1.

"Each diocese, in the interest of transparency and accountability, plans to comply with the attorney general's request," said a joint statement issued June 3 by the bishops of the Archdiocese of Dubuque and the dioceses of Davenport, Des Moines and Sioux City.

"Most of the information requested is already a matter of public record," the statement said.

Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller also announced the same day an "800" number to report abuse, in English and Spanish, to his office. Though he said in a statement he appreciated the Iowa bishops' cooperation and for making public lists of "credibly accused" clergy, "a credible third-party review is warranted."

The bishops' statement said that "efforts of each diocese to protect minors from clergy sexual abuse have for many years now been subject to an annual credible third-party review."

"Our compliance is inspired by the teachings of Jesus and his Catholic Church: that it is right and good to respond to the sin and crime of clergy sexual abuse with sorrow, repentance, amendment of life, and efforts to repair the harm done," the statement said.

"In this regard, if there have been failures in the past, it is not for lack of trying," it continued. "And after discovering when and where our efforts have fallen short, we will try again; there is no perfection this side of heaven. It is our hope that the attorney general will use the resources of his office to protect minors from the scourge of sexual abuse wherever it occurs, and not limit his focus just on the Catholic Church."

In a letter to the state's bishops, Miller said officials from his office met with clergy sex abuse survivors.

"In some cases, their stories have never been made public," the letter said. "These survivors have urged us to investigate and bring attention to the injustice they and others have suffered. We agree that full transparency is necessary to provide justice and ultimately, reconciliation and healing."

The office seeks "lists of all priests, deacons, or other clergy who have been deemed as 'credibly accused' of sexual abuse by the dioceses," as well as of clergy "in which the dioceses deemed the accusation 'not credible,'" and definitions of what the dioceses consider "credibly accused," "sexual misconduct" and "sexual abuse."

Other documents include notes from meetings of diocesan review boards convened to consider accusations, reports of abuse received by diocesan officials and actions taken, and copies of all settlement agreements that diocesan officials entered into with abuse survivors.

In a separate statement, Bishop Thomas Zinkula of Davenport said the third-party review will help in determining if the diocese has been on the right track in addressing abuse and, if necessary, in making changes to the process.

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"I apologize for abuse by clergy that occurred in the past," he said in the June 4 statement. "In 2002, the bishops of the United States made significant and sweeping

changes to the church’s role in protecting children and vulnerable adults.

"As a result, since 2003, the Diocese of Davenport has provided safe environment training to approximately 18,708 adults, 8,638 children, and we have completed over 51,759 background checks. These efforts have helped," he said. "The Diocese of Davenport has not received any reports of child abuse by clergy or church personnel that occurred since 1988, 31 years ago."

However, the church and society need to remain vigilant, Zinkula said, in providing safe environments for children.

"Our commitment to safe environment training goes beyond the doors of the church and our schools," he said. "I look forward to working with the other dioceses in Iowa and with Mr. Miller in ensuring transparency and accountability, and above all, providing safety for those among us who are most vulnerable."

Tom Chapman, executive director of the Iowa Catholic Conference, said in a statement that "the efforts of each diocese to protect minors from clergy sexual abuse have for many years now been subject to an annual credible third-party review."

"It is our hope that the attorney general will use the resources of his office to protect minors from the scourge of sexual abuse wherever it occurs, and not limit his focus just on the Catholic Church," Chapman added.

After the attorney general issued his letter, the Diocese of Sioux City noted that Bishop R. Walker Nickless and others from that diocese had met with Miller in Des Moines last December to discuss various issues connected with the continuing concerns regarding the child abuse crisis.

"Due to the interest by various attorneys general around the country on this issue, the Iowa bishops asked for the opportunity to visit with the attorney general to determine what he might expect of them and what assistance the attorney general could possibly provide," Nickless stated in an article in the Dec. 20, 2018, edition of The Catholic Globe, Sioux City's diocesan paper.

"I thought that the meeting was extremely helpful," he said. "We acquainted the attorney general with our efforts. We look forward to working with him on this difficult issue."