News

Bishop David James Oakley of Northampton

Bishop David James Oakley of Northampton is seen in an undated photo. In a June 25, 2026, statement, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales renewed its commitment to safeguarding after police in Staffordshire announced that the bishop was charged with the rape of a minor. (OSV News/courtesy of Diocese of Northampton)

Junno Arocho Esteves

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The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales renewed its commitment to safeguarding after police in Staffordshire announced that a bishop in central England was charged with the rape of a minor.

In a statement published June 25, the bishops said the news of the accusations against Bishop David James Oakley of Northampton was "deeply distressing for all, both within the Catholic community and beyond."

"We are profoundly aware that the report of this allegation may reawaken painful memories for many people and again offer an unreserved apology to those who have been hurt by abuse in the Catholic Church in England and Wales," the bishops'

conference said.

The statement was signed by Archbishop Richard Moth of Westminster and Archbishop Bernard Longley of Birmingham, the president and vice president of the bishops' conference, respectively.

Staffordshire Police confirmed June 24 that Oakley, 70, was charged with two counts of rape against a "female under 16."

According to the statement, Oakley was arrested in September after the crime was reported to the police and is set to appear at Cannock Magistrates' Court Aug. 14.

The Diocese of Northampton, where he had served as bishop since 2020, also confirmed the charges against Oakley "after an investigation into non-recent safeguarding allegations."

"We understand that this will be very distressing for all concerned but cannot comment further on an active legal process," the diocese said.

BBC News reported that police said the crimes were alleged to have taken place between February 2000 and February 2001. During that period, Oakley was serving as parish priest at St. Giles Church in the central English town of Cheadle.

At the time of his arrest, the diocese announced that Oakley was on a leave of absence for personal reasons, according to The Tablet. Several months later, a local Catholic blog, Clerical Whispers, had leaked a message from the vicar general to diocesan clergy confirming that the leave of absence was "due to an allegation" made against the bishop.

According to *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* ("You are the light of the world"), the church's procedures for investigating allegations of sexual abuse or the cover up of abuse, once an accusation against a bishop is received, it must be sent "both to the Holy See and to the Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province where the person reported is domiciled."

Neil Roseman, communications director for the Diocese of Northampton, told OSV News June 26 that "at present, Bishop David Oakley remains withdrawn from public ministry." However, he declined to comment on the status of the canonical investigation against the bishop.

In their statement, the bishops of England and Wales reassured the faithful of their commitment to safeguard and maintain a "zero-tolerance policy for abuse in the Church and in wider society."

The bishops also said they were "cooperating fully with the statutory authorities."

"Our immediate focus is on providing pastoral support and ensuring that we, as the Church, can continue our mission safely and transparently," the statement read. "Anybody who comes to our parishes, schools and communities must be safe and we are resolute in our commitment to safeguarding."

They also invited victims to meet with them "so that we can learn from and be guided by their experiences as we continue to make our communities safe places."

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