News



The Golden Dome with its statue of Mary is seen Aug. 6, 2021, atop the administration building of the University of Notre Dame in Notre Dame, Indiana. (OSV News/Chaz Muth)

Gina Christian

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The University of Notre Dame is investigating anonymous allegations of abuse posted online regarding a campus rector of a women's residence hall.

The female rector is now on leave "pending the outcome of the investigation," the university told OSV News in a statement July 8.

"The University takes allegations of sexual misconduct seriously, particularly when persons in positions of authority may be involved, and is conducting an investigation," it said.

OSV News has made several attempts to contact the rector through various channels, including by phone and by social media, but has not yet received a response.

Following professional news standards, OSV News is not disclosing her name at this time due to the uncorroborated nature of the anonymous, social media-based allegations. An investigation has not yet determined the credibility of the allegations nor has the rector been charged with a crime.

The allegations emerged in a series of posts on Instagram published in June by shareyourstory.notredame, an Instagram account which is not affiliated with the university. The profile describes the account as "sharing the stories of sexual assault, abuse, and stalking victims at the University of Notre Dame," adding, "For survivors. By survivors."

Along with the hashtag #StopTheSilence, the account profile includes a Google Forms link through which complaints can be submitted. Submissions are "strictly anonymous," with no emails or identifying information collected, according to the form.

The document also states, "We believe all victims," with all submissions posted to the Instagram account, provided they do not violate the platform's terms of service.

The first 21 posts to the account — which do not mention the rector — appear to have been uploaded April 12-20, with each designated as a "Submission" and assigned a sequential number.

The initial allegation against the rector was detailed in a June 17 post titled "Submission #24." The text alleged abuse by a female rector at one of the all-female dormitories on campus. The anonymous complainant claimed she was plied with alcohol and sexually assaulted after consulting the rector while distraught over a breakup with her longtime boyfriend.

Another message was posted on June 17 — "Submission #25" — alleging inappropriate behavior by the rector after being added as a Snapchat contact.

The account administrator told OSV News the names of the rector and residence hall were redacted in the initial June 17 post. The administrator included the rector's name for a short time in at least one later post — after the name appeared in at least one media outlet, and in an effort to make clear that multiple posts were referring to only one rector — before redacting it again upon informal legal advice.

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On July 9, OSV News spoke at length with the administrator of the shareyourstory.notredame Instagram account. The administrator — who agreed to speak with OSV News on condition of anonymity, and whose identity OSV News has verified — received direct messages over Instagram from the university's student health and wellness account, on behalf of that center and the university's Office of Institutional Equity.

In a joint message, the two offices said the Instagram posts about the rector had been reported to the university, and asked if the account administrator could provide the rector's identity while posting information on the account about reporting and support services for sexual assault victims.

The administrator then shared an Instagram story — a temporary message that expires after 24 hours — seeking permission from the authors of submissions No. 24 and No. 25 to do so. The administrator told OSV News this message prompted a second Google Forms filing June 18 from someone identifying as the "Submission #24" complainant, who then granted permission to share the name of the rector and

hall with the university. The administrator did so anonymously through Notre Dame's online reporting system.

Since June 17, the account has posted a half-dozen additional anonymous complaints — some of which are graphic — about the rector, noting in comments that despite the redactions, the various complaints referred to the same individual.

The university's webpage states that the rector is "currently on leave." A university source confirmed that action was taken on June 29.

A university source told the South Bend Tribune in a story published July 6 that, contrary to some claims on shareyourstory.notredame, the accused rector has been "completely cooperative with the investigation."

In its statement to OSV News, the university said, "Members of the campus community who experience sexual misconduct are strongly encouraged to report it to law enforcement and/or the Office of Institutional Equity." It added that reports to the office "can be made at speakup.nd.edu."

"Without reporting, our ability to investigate allegations is severely limited and we strongly encourage anyone with information to please reach out," said the university.

In May, the university announced the release of an independent report showing that two Holy Cross priests who oversaw University of Notre Dame residence halls sexually abused several students during their tenure in the 1980s and 1990s, with both continuing their abuse in parish settings after leaving the school.

The report found that "while Notre Dame's commitment to addressing clergy abuse has been clear, the University's execution has been inconsistent."

In response to the findings, the university said it has created a survivors' counseling support program, while "taking immediate action" to redress issues raised in the report by implementing a new oversight policy, improving information exchanges between Notre Dame and the Holy Cross Fathers, and strengthening education and reporting around abuse.