News

Bishop J. Douglas Deshotel of Lafayette, La., center, and other U.S. bishops arrive to conceleb

Bishop J. Douglas Deshotel of Lafayette, La., center, and other U.S. bishops arrive to concelebrate Mass in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Dec. 5, 2019. (CNS/Paul Haring)



by Camillo Barone

NCR staff reporter

View Author Profile
cbarone@ncronline.org

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

October 21, 2026

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The Vatican has rejected a Louisiana deacon's appeal of his excommunication after he left the Catholic Church in the aftermath of his son's sexual abuse by a priest. The Vatican acknowledged the family's ordeal, but ruled that his formal decision to join an Anglican congregation constituted schism.

The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith upheld Lafayette Bishop J. Douglas Deshotel's March 2024 declaration that Scott Peyton had incurred automatic excommunication. Its decree, signed May 22, 2026, was delivered to Peyton on Oct. 16, nearly two and a half years after he appealed to Rome.

"While I am disappointed, I am not surprised," Peyton said in a statement to the National Catholic Reporter. "Apparently, according to Bishop Deshotel, finding a faith community where my family can worship without reliving the trauma endured is a

greater scandal to the Diocese of Lafayette than the sexual abuse of a child. I find that deeply troubling."

The decision brings an answer, but not a conclusion, to a case NCR reported on in April, when Peyton was still awaiting Rome's ruling. His pro bono canon lawyer, Dawn Eden Goldstein, told NCR that Peyton intends to appeal.

Peyton was ordained a permanent deacon in Lafayette in 2012 and served at St. Peter Church in Morrow, where his family was active in parish life. In 2018, his son Oliver disclosed that the parish priest, Fr. Michael Guidry, had sexually abused him in 2015. Guidry, 83, pleaded guilty in 2019 to molesting a juvenile and received a 10-year prison sentence, with three years suspended. He remains jailed, with release possible by the end of the year.



Scott Peyton, left, is pictured serving as a deacon during a confirmation Mass with Bishop J. Douglas Deshotel of Lafayette, Louisiana, center, and Casey Dugas, a then-transitional deacon, in June 2020. (Courtesy of Letitia Peyton)

The Peytons have said the diocese compounded the harm by revealing details that made Oliver identifiable in their small community and by failing to protect the family from hostility after the allegation became public. Their lawsuit against Guidry and the diocese was settled in 2021. The diocese apologized to Oliver and his family, found the accusation credible and announced that Guidry had been permanently removed from ministry.

In December 2023, Peyton told Deshotel he was leaving the Catholic Church and the diaconate. He and his family were formally received into Trinity Anglican Church the following January. After Peyton publicized the development on his social media, Deshotel declared in March 2024 that the deacon had incurred *latae sententiae*, or automatic, excommunication for schism.

The Vatican decree's central argument turns on the difference between seeking refuge in another faith community and formally joining one. Church law, it says, distinguishes informal attendance at non-Catholic worship from a public act of entering another ecclesial body.

The dicastery concluded that Peyton's reception into the Anglican church, and his subsequent announcement on social media, demonstrated a conscious break with submission to the pope and communion with the Catholic Church.

The Vatican's analysis also repeatedly recognized the circumstances that preceded his departure. The decree called them "indeed tragic" and described Peyton's desire to remove his family from an "untenable" situation and preserve their Christian faith as "both noble desires."

"These goals, however, do not justify a formal separation from the Roman Pontiff," the decree said. It also acknowledged that Deshotel "could have been more explicit in warning Deacon Peyton about the canonical consequences of his proposed course of action."

Although the dicastery pointed out how the circumstances helped explain Peyton's motives, it said they did not outweigh the fact that his decision to formally join the

Anglican church was deliberate.

Goldstein had compared the family's departure to the canonical right of a spouse to leave an abusive marriage. The dicastery rejected that analogy as grounds for formally joining another church.

In a written account of the Oct. 16 meeting with Deshotel sent to NCR, Goldstein said that the Vatican procedures required communications with the dicastery to pass through the bishop whose action Peyton was contesting.



Scott Peyton and his pro bono canon lawyer Dawn Eden Goldstein pose before the Oct. 16 meeting with Lafayette, La., Bishop J. Douglas Deshotel. (Courtesy of Dawn Eden Goldstein)

Goldstein also said that the bishop introduced news reports quoting Peyton without allowing him to verify or contextualize the statements. The Vatican decree cites two

March 2024 interviews, including one in which Peyton suggested he would wear his excommunication "as an honor" if the diocese considered his criticism of its handling of abuse a grave offense. The document does not identify who submitted those articles.

"Only he could communicate directly with the DDF," Goldstein said, referring to Deshotel. "Only he could see all the evidence presented by both sides."

Goldstein said Deshotel telephoned Peyton on Oct. 13 and met with him three days later at an office supplied by Peyton's eldest son, Alex. Goldstein and Peyton's wife, Letitia, were present. After the bishop handed over the decree, he agreed to a 30-minute recess for Peyton and his advocate to review it.

When they reconvened, Goldstein told the bishop that the Peytons no longer attended an Anglican church. The couple's children had found aspects of Anglican worship painfully reminiscent of their work as altar servers with Guidry, she said. The family now worships at a nondenominational congregation.

The meeting also turned to Guidry's canonical status. According to Goldstein, she repeatedly asked Deshotel whether he had recommended to the Vatican that Guidry remain a priest rather than be laicized after being sentenced for sexual abuse of Peyton's son. She said the bishop eventually acknowledged having made that recommendation because of Guidry's age.

The diocese has said Guidry is permanently barred from ministry. It has not, however, confirmed if he has been dismissed from the clerical state. The Diocese of Lafayette did not respond to NCR's Oct. 19 request for comments, confirmation of Goldstein's account and clarification of Guidry's canonical status.

"You have elected to show mercy to the priest who sexually abused your deacon's son, and you've chosen to avoid imposing a penalty that is commensurate with that priest's most grave delict, whereas you have imposed the harshest penalty upon your own deacon. These are both clergy," Goldstein recalled telling the bishop on Oct. 16.

Advertisement

In the meeting with Deshotel, Letitia Peyton challenged the notion that her husband leaving the Catholic Church had caused a public scandal. "The public scandal was not caused by Scott's Facebook post," she told Deshotel, according to Goldstein's account. She blamed Guidry's abuse and Deshotel's public remarks identifying the family. "The excommunication hurt my entire family for generations," she said, adding that three granddaughters no longer attend church.

Scott Peyton similarly criticized what he sees as a disparity between civil punishment for Guidry and church discipline for himself. "You've allowed the civil authorities to discipline your priest, not you," he said.

Goldstein said in the end she again offered a compromise: Peyton would abide by the restrictions associated with the automatic penalty, without conceding its legitimacy, if Deshotel withdrew his public declaration. Deshotel on Jan. 6 will turn 75, the age at which bishops must submit their resignations. Goldstein urged him to "go out on a note of mercy and just remit the damn excommunication." She said Deshotel replied that he would lift the penalty if Peyton repented of schism.

The decree itself — signed by the prefect of the DDF, Cardinal Victor Manuela Fernández, and secretary for discipline of the DDF, Archbishop John Joseph Kennedy — says remission of the excommunication falls to the local bishop, while removing the impediment to exercising holy orders is reserved to the dicastery. It also gives Peyton 60 days from notification to file a further appeal with the Vatican office.