



SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE WORD
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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

REGARDING THE RELEASE OF NAMES AND PROCEDURES FOR PREVENTING ABUSE

Q: What information are you releasing?

A: The Western Province of the Society of the Divine Word is releasing information associated with allegations of sexual abuse of minors. The names of those against whom there is a credible allegation of the sexual abuse of a minor are separated into four groups. [**NOTE:** The word “Members” refers to Divine Word priests and Brothers. They may also be referred to as “Divine Word Missionaries.”]

1. **Living Members of the Western Province** against whom there is a credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor.
2. **Deceased Members of the Western Province** against whom there is a credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor. Included in this list are members who sexually abused a minor while in the Western Province and then were transferred to another province and are now deceased.
3. **Former Members of the Western Province** who are alive and now assigned to another province in the Society of the Divine Word against whom there is a credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor.
4. **Former Members of the Western Province** no longer affiliated with the Society of the Divine Word against whom there is a credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor that occurred while they were a member of the Society of the Divine Word.

Q: Where is this information available?

A: This information is accessible on the Protecting Children section of the Western Province website at 'Hope and Healing'. The link is <http://www.svdusw.org/hope-and-healing/>

Q: What is meant by a credible allegation?

A: An allegation is deemed “credible” if there is a preponderance of evidence that the allegation is more likely true than not. The Review Board—an independent board of lay professionals from the fields of psychology, law enforcement, church ministry, law and human resources—reviews the allegation, investigation reports, personnel files and other relevant information in order to make a judgment on the credibility of the allegation. That judgment is presented to the Provincial who makes the final decision on

credibility in accordance with province policies approved by the accrediting agency.

Credibility can also be established by a conviction in court or by the admission of the truth of the allegation by the member.

Q: Are any credibly accused Western Province members still in public ministry?

A: No.

Q: When did these incidents of sexual abuse of a minor occur?

A: The majority of the credible acts of sexual abuse occurred before the year 2000 with most incidents occurring in the period from the 1950s–1980s. Since the year 2000, there has been one credible allegation of the sexual abuse of a minor and one credible incident of inappropriate electronic communication of a sexual nature with a minor.

Q: Did some members engage in public ministry after the abuse took place?

A: In many cases, the allegation was received many years after the abuse took place, so a member may have continued in public ministry because Western Province leaders were not aware of the abuse.

There are other situations going as far back as the 1970s, however, when an allegation of the sexual abuse of a minor became known, the member was immediately removed from public ministry and forbidden to have any contact with minors.

In other cases, especially in the 1970s–1990s members were sometimes allowed to resume public ministry after an allegation provided that the member successfully completed psychological treatment. We now know that even with treatment, a person who has abused a minor should not return to public ministry or have contact with minors.

Our awareness of the nature and effect of abuse of minors has changed dramatically over the years. We are diligent in investigating all allegations of abuse, and we do not allow anyone with a credible allegation to engage in public ministry. We now recognize our failures of the past in this regard, and we are deeply sorry.

Since 2002 when the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People was instituted, clear and consistent procedures have been developed for removing from public ministry members with a credible allegation of abuse of a minor.

Q: Why are you releasing this information now?

A: Recent revelations about sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy, religious Brothers, teachers, sports coaches and other church workers are leading the People of God rightly to desire greater accountability from the leadership of the Church. We are releasing this information to provide that kind of transparency. We view this disclosure as part of our commitment to preventing abuse and hope that it will contribute to the process of restoring trust.

Q: What happens when an allegation is received?

A: When a claim involving abuse of a minor is made against a member, the Province immediately reports it to law enforcement whether the abuse is current or happened in the past. The Province fully cooperates with legal authorities throughout their

investigation.

Upon receipt of an allegation involving sexual misconduct with a minor, regardless of the victim's current age, the accused member is removed from ministry pending the outcome of the investigation.

The Province offers pastoral and therapeutic services to the victim.

The Province also opens its own internal investigation irrespective of whether a criminal investigation is initiated. Results of the investigation are evaluated by the Review Board and Provincial as described above.

Q: What happens to a member when an allegation of abuse is deemed credible?

A: We are committed to safeguarding others and preventing future abuse while also caring for our members, even those who have committed serious offenses. Any member who is credibly accused of abuse is not permitted to engage in public ministry or wear clerical or religious attire.

The member must observe a "Safety Plan" (code of conduct) in a closely monitored environment. Safety Plans specify risk reduction strategies and restrictions on behavior, including the use of technology, money, travel and access by visitors. The plans are developed and monitored in consultation with the Review Board and professional supervisors.

Q: What are you doing to make sure this never happens again?

A: The Western Province has a zero-tolerance policy regarding instances of inappropriate conduct between a member and a minor. We have had protocols and procedures in place since 2003 as part of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (Dallas Charter), a comprehensive set of procedures originally established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. Further, the Western Province observes the *Instruments of Hope and Healing: Safeguarding Children and Young People*, the Standards for Accreditation for the Child Protection Program of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM).

Q: Is there an external review of the Western Province policies and procedures?

A: The Western Province is accredited by Praesidium, Inc., an organization providing consultation, risk management assessment, policy development, and training materials for use in preventing sexual misconduct and responding to allegations of sexual misconduct. The Province maintains accreditation through regular audits conducted by trained, certified staff members of Praesidium. The Western Province belongs to Region 6 of the CMSM which meets annually, and more often if needed, to oversee the response to all allegations of the sexual abuse of a minor including the review of the investigation, reporting to civil and church authorities, assistance to the victim and restriction of the member should he be alive.

In 2020, the Western Province retained the services of a federal law enforcement official to complete a thorough review of the personnel files of all the members – current, former and deceased – of the Western Province. The purpose of this review was to locate and document every case of the sexual abuse of a minor.

Q: What are you doing to screen, educate and monitor members?

A: Before a young man is accepted into the Society of the Divine Word, he undergoes an in-depth screening process in our Central Province that includes a psychosexual assessment, social media evaluation and an extensive criminal background check.

At every stage of seminary formation and through their active ministry, members receive regular safe-environment training to promote ethical conduct in ministry and awareness and sensitivity of professional boundaries.

There is an annual continuing education requirement that members received training in preventing sexual abuse and meet with a religious superior to review compliance with all appropriate standards of behavior.

The members are required to follow regular updating programs offered by Virtus Inc. that are designed to help prevent child sexual abuse. The Virtus standard for risk control requires an organization to demand and enforce "no tolerance" for wrongdoing and open communication channels with everyone in the organization.

Q: What is the Society of the Divine Word?

A: The Society of the Divine Word is a worldwide Catholic religious organization of more than 6,000 missionary priests and Brothers serving in more than 75 countries. The central headquarters are in Rome, Italy. There are 61 geographic governing units known as provinces, regions or missions throughout the world.

Q. What is the Western Province?

A: The Western Province is one of the 61 geographic governing units of the Society of the Divine Word. It currently has about 60 members including priests and Brothers who have professed religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Members serve in the state of California.

Q. Are there other Divine Word provinces in the United States?

A: The Southern Province with headquarters in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, has about 65 members serving in Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas and Florida. The Chicago Province has about 220 members serving in ten states and Washington DC, the provinces of Ontario and Quebec in Canada, and on ten Caribbean islands.

Q: How can I report abuse?

A: If you believe that you, or someone you know, is being or has been abused by a member of the Western Province currently or at any time in the past, we urge you to follow the procedures explained in the webpage **Guide for Reporting**. If there is suspicion or knowledge that a child is currently being abused, the one so informed should immediately notify the proper civil authorities.

Q. Where can I get help?

A. Parents or caretakers who are in need of support can:

- Call the National Parent Helpline at 1-855-427-2736, or,
- Call the National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD or 800-422-4453.

- Obtain help via online therapy to [reduce stressors](#) or find venting and/or coping opportunities.
- The child abuse hotlines for San Bernardino Diocese are:
 - Riverside County: 800-442-4918
 - San Bernardino County: 800-827-8724

Q: How can I report suspected child abuse or neglect

Contact law enforcement or child protective services (CPS) in your [state or county](#).

In California call the California Department of Social Services. The hotlines for the various counties where the abuse is occurring are listed on the website:

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/reporting/report-abuse/child-protective-services/report-child-abuse>.

Q: For suspicion, fear or concern of immediate abuse?

A. Please call 911.

Q: To report suspected online sexual exploitation?

A. Contact the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 1-800-843-5678 or online at www.cybertipline.org.

For more information, contact:

Director of Child Protection

Western Province, Society of the Divine Word

909-883-8981

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