



T H E D I O C E S E O F
HOUMA THIBODAUX
Post Office Box 505 * Schriever, Louisiana 70395 * 985.850.3124

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 11, 2019 at 12.00 pm
Houma, Louisiana

Excerpts from

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

by Bishop Shelton J. Fabre

*For the full text of *Light in the Darkness*, please see hdiocese.org/lightinthedarkness*

To the dear people of God in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux:

I address you today because I care for you, and because your faith in Jesus Christ is important to me. I write to you because you are an important part of the Body of Christ, the Church. Today the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux is releasing the names of any priest with a credible allegation of child sexual abuse since our inception in 1977. *Be assured that no priest in current active ministry in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux is on the list.*

I want to apologize for the egregious sins that have taken place. Let me be clear: the abuse of a child by anyone is sinful, abhorrent and evil, particularly when perpetrated by one vested with the sacred trust of God's children. Furthermore, any attempt to cover up these sins is even more disturbing. I apologize to all who have been harmed. It is with deep respect and profound reverence that I humbly extend this apology.

It is understandable if victims and their families feel angry and abandoned and if they mistrust the leadership of the church because of its failure to adequately respond to their distress and attend to their needs. The lifelong process of healing that is necessary after enduring abuse is a road marked with struggle and I pray that the Church can assist every step of the way.

I am fully aware that the words "I'm sorry" ring hollow in light of what you have endured, but I apologize on behalf of the Church for damages caused by any cleric who has sinned. I apologize if victims and their families ever felt shunned by the church or if any bishop at any time failed to listen to them. I apologize to all who have been harmed by action and inaction that could have been avoided. With deep personal grief in my own heart, I express that I am sorry.

If you have been a victim of child sexual abuse by a priest, I, with great reverence, say to you now: The door is open. We invite you to come forward. Our Victims' Assistance Coordinator is Sister Carmelita Centanni, M.S.C., Ph.D. Sister Carmelita is a religious Sister of the Marianites of Holy Cross. Sister Carmelita is also a Licensed Professional Clinical Psychologist. Before joining the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, she served in the Archdiocese of New Orleans where she also served as Victims' Assistance Coordinator. Sister Carmelita has over 30 years of counseling experience, as well as 16 years as a Victims' Assistance Coordinator. You may reach Sister Carmelita directly at 985.850.3172 or by email at ccentanni@htdiocese.org.

Sister Carmelita is here to assist you. I, as your bishop, am here to assist you. We are committed, now more than ever, to walking with you toward healing. If you have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is being or has been abused by anyone, please first contact the civil authorities by calling the Louisiana Child Abuse Hotline at 855.452.5437. If you suspect that the abuser is a priest, deacon or member of church personnel, after calling civil authorities please also call Sister Carmelita. You may also call the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux Outreach Line at 985.873.0026.

Let me explain the process that was used to determine this release of names. The 2002 *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* outlines the norms and policies that must be followed regarding the sexual abuse of a minor. The *Charter* not only defines what sexual abuse is, but in so doing outlines what matters must be brought before the Diocesan Lay Review Board. All such matters were brought to our Diocesan Lay Review Board in the fall of 2018.

As bishop, I made an intentional decision to give the Diocesan Lay Review Board the authority to determine whether the allegations had evidence of credibility and were substantiated. In so doing, the Diocesan Lay Review Board determined and recommended to me the list of the names that have been published. As mentioned earlier, our Diocesan Lay Review Board is comprised of leaders with over 200 years of expertise in law enforcement, legal and medical professions, and social services. Our current board is chaired by Judge Morris Lottinger, Jr., retired chief judge of the Louisiana First Circuit Court of Appeal. He served on the court from 1975 to 1998. The court has both civil and criminal jurisdiction in Terrebonne, Lafourche and St. Mary parishes as well as thirteen other parishes. The names of the remaining six members of the Diocesan Lay Review Board remain confidential.

Be assured that no priest in current active ministry in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux is on this list. I encourage you to visit our website: htdiocese.org/lightinthedarkness. On this webpage, you will also find the full text of my Pastoral Letter and other resources regarding this issue, including videos for adults, parents and youth.

The following priests admitted, were convicted, or pled guilty:

LAWRENCE CAVELL

- Ordained in 1989
- Admitted to solicitation of a minor
- All priestly faculties permanently removed by the Diocese
- Served at Holy Cross in Morgan City, Sacred Heart in Montegut, Saint Francis de Sales in Houma, Saint Genevieve in Thibodaux, and Saint Mary in Raceland

ALEXANDER FRANCISCO

- Ordained in 1979
- Admitted to inappropriate physical contact with a minor
- All priestly faculties permanently removed by the Diocese
- Served at Holy Cross in Morgan City, Saint Bernadette in Houma, Saint Bridget in Schriever, Saint Joseph in Thibodaux, and Saint Thomas Aquinas in Thibodaux

DALE GUIDRY

- Ordained in 1982
- Pled guilty to online solicitation of a minor and accused of molestation of a minor
- Died October 20, 2013
- Served at Saint Joseph in Galliano

PATRICK KUJAWA

- Ordained in 1996
- Pled guilty to possession of child pornography
- Convicted and currently incarcerated
- All priestly faculties permanently removed by the Diocese
- Served at Holy Cross in Morgan City and Saint Francis de Sales in Houma

ROBERT MELANCON

- Ordained in 1962
- Convicted of aggravated rape of a minor
- Died November 5, 2018
- Served at Annunziata in Houma, Sacred Heart in Cut Off, and Saint Genevieve in Thibodaux

CARLOS MELENDEZ

- Priest of the Missionaries of Christ Crucified in El Salvador
- Accused of inappropriate physical contact with a minor and pled guilty to misdemeanor battery against a minor
- All priestly faculties permanently removed within the Diocese
- United States Immigration returned him to his native El Salvador
- Current status or location unknown
- Served in Diocesan Hispanic Ministry

DEFINITION

- **Faculties:** a *faculty* is the authority, privilege, or permission, to perform an act or function. When we refer to “priestly faculties” we refer to one’s ability to function as a priest. One is only able to perform priestly ministry when authority, privilege, and permission has been granted by a bishop. Therefore, when priestly faculties have been permanently revoked, a man is no longer able to function as a priest.

The following priests are the subject of credible allegations of sexual molestation of a minor that were the subject of civil litigation:

ETIENNE LEBLANC

- Ordained in 1971
- All priestly faculties permanently removed by the Diocese
- Served at Annunziata in Houma, Holy Cross in Morgan City, Holy Family in Dulac, Saint Eloi in Theriot, Sacred Heart in Galliano, Saint Hilary in Mathews, and Saint Thomas Aquinas in Thibodaux

GERALD PRINZ

- Ordained in 1968
- All priestly faculties permanently removed by the Diocese
- Served at Saint Francis de Sales in Houma, Saint Gregory in Houma, and Saint Louis in Bayou Blue

BERNARD SCHMALTZ

- Ordained in 1973
- Died February 5, 2010
- Served at Annunziata in Houma

The following priests are the subject of credible allegations of serious and unacceptable conduct with minors, ranging from inappropriate physical contact of a minor to molestation of a minor:

CLAUDE BOUDREAUX

- Jesuit priest who offered weekend assistance in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux
- Ordained in 1955
- Died August 5, 2016

GERARD KINANE

- Priest of the Archdiocese of New Orleans
- Ordained in 1973
- All priestly faculties permanently removed by the Diocese
- Served at Saint Hilary in Mathews

RAMON LUCE

- Priest of the Diocese of San Pablo in the Philippines
- Ordained in 1995
- Voluntarily left the priesthood
- Served at Holy Savior in Lockport

DAC NGUYEN

- Priest of the Society of Domus Dei
- Ordained in 1988
- All priestly faculties permanently removed within the Diocese
- Current status or location unknown
- Served at Thanh Gia (Holy Family) in Amelia

DANIEL POCHE

- Ordained in 1978
- All priestly faculties permanently removed by the Diocese
- Served at Holy Cross in Morgan City, Sacred Heart in Cut Off, Saint Bernadette in Houma, Saint Francis de Sales in Houma, Saint Hilary in Mathews, and Saint Joseph in Chauvin