

Dear Friends in Christ,

This week the Diocese of Jackson will release the names of clergy who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse. It is our hope and prayer that releasing these names will confirm our commitment to transparency in the pursuit of our Promise to Protect and our Pledge to Heal the harm caused by abuse in the church. The list will be posted on the diocesan website on Tuesday, March 19, and will be printed inside the *Mississippi Catholic* set to come out at the end of the week.

We know that this list will cause pain to many individuals and communities and I am truly, deeply sorry for that pain. The crime of abuse of any kind is a sin, but the abuse of children and vulnerable adults is especially egregious. First and foremost, it is a sin against the innocent victims, but also a sin against the Church and our communities. It is a sin that cries out for justice.

The time for trying to keep these cases quiet in the church has come to an end. We now know that this deep wound in the Body of Christ will not heal until we lay bare the sins of the past and work together toward reconciliation. Releasing this list is not the end of a process, it is another step forward in the ongoing effort to reform our church.

In addition to the list, look for additional information about how our Office of Child Protection and Safe Environments is working to screen and educate employees and volunteers as well as educating children and families in self-protection, in hopes of preventing abuse in the future.

The majority of the cases on our list are from the past. This does not make them any less hurtful or significant, but it does indicate that the measures the Church and the Diocese of Jackson have put into place to prevent abuse are having an impact.

We know it can take years for a victim to come forward. We want to hear from those who have been abused by a member of the clergy or an employee of the church. Not only is it our legal duty to report these cases, helping victims find healing and wholeness is our moral imperative. Anyone can contact our Victim's Assistance Coordinator Valerie McClellan at (601) 326-3728 to seek help.

Again, I apologize from the depths of my heart to those who have been sexually abused by clergy and church personnel, to the families damaged by these crimes and to the Catholic community for the scandal this scourge has brought upon our Church. There is no room for this evil in our society or our churches.

It is my hope that the release of this list during the penitential season of Lent will remind us to pray for all those impacted by abuse and recommit all of us to the Promise to Protect and the Pledge to Heal.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph R. Kopacz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+ Joseph R. Kopacz
Bishop of Jackson