

5 Catholic priests charged in Michigan sex abuse investigation

Niraj Warikoo, Detroit Free Press Published 12:32 p.m. ET May 24, 2019 | Updated 11:19 p.m. ET May 24, 2019

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel announces criminal charges against 5 Catholic priests in Michigan. (Photo: Junfu Han, Detroit Free Press)



As part of the state's investigation into sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel announced Friday criminal sexual conduct charges against five priests in Michigan.

"Some of these clergy ... preyed on young children," Nessel said at a news conference about the men who were priests at the time of the alleged abuse. She said the five cases were the "tip of the iceberg" as investigators continue to track down hundreds of tips on abuse by Catholic priests.

In some of the incidents, the priests mixed their sexual activity with references to Catholic beliefs or committed the acts during Catholic rituals such as confession, according to allegations in affidavits.

In other cases, the priests plied children with drugs such as cocaine, marijuana

and alcohol before sexually assaulting them, allege prosecutors and police. In one case, a priest is accused of threatening to kill his victim if the boy reported the abuse.

Deputy Solicitor General Ann Sherman, who is helping with the investigations, said that some Catholic Church officials have alarming views on sexual abuse of children.

"I am deeply disturbed by what we have discovered," Sherman said at the news conference. "I'm also disturbed by some attitudes of some of the hierarchy

in the church ... who demonstrated a serious misunderstanding of sexual assault."

In one case, a priest "explained that this child victim needed to simply admit that he teased, enticed, or gave permission for the abuse to occur," Sherman said. "This attitude is horrific. Sexual abuse is never the fault of the victim and it certainly can never be that sexual abuse of a child is a child's fault."

Nessel urged people who are victims or may have information about abuse to contact them. She was joined by several attorneys on her staff pursuing justice for victims and also an abuse victim, Andy Russell, who urged victims to come forward.

"We are your voice," Nessel said. "We are here for you"

The five Catholic priests charged are:

► **Timothy Michael Crowley**, 69, of the Lansing Diocese, was charged in Washtenaw County with four felony counts of criminal sexual conduct (CSC) in the first degree, and four felony counts of CSC in the second degree. Crowley, who once was a priest at St. Thomas Rectory in Ann Arbor, was arrested Thursday in Tempe, Arizona.

Crowley is accused of fellatio and sexual penetration with a 10-year-old boy, plying him with alcohol and cigarettes. He threatened to kill the boy if he reported the incidents, said the affidavit.

"On multiple occasions, Crowley provided JOHN DOE with cigarettes and alcohol and forced JOHN DOE to watch pornography depicting homosexual sex," read the affidavit. "Crowley would masturbate himself in JOHN DOE's presence."

While serving as an altar boy, the boy would stay the night with Crowley in his bed, according to the affidavit.

"On at least one occasion, Crowley forced JOHN DOE's head down onto Crowley's penis, causing Crowley's penis to penetrate JOHN DOE's mouth," said the affidavit.

"On one occasion at either St. Anthony or St. Thomas, Crowley told JOHN DOE that if JOHN DOE told the nun or his parents about the abuse, Crowley would kill him," read the affidavit.

In a statement, the Diocese of Lansing said that an allegation was made in 1993 against Crowley, "who was removed from ministry in the Diocese of Lansing by Bishop Kenneth Povish. At that time, Crowley was serving as pastor of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, Ann Arbor. The Archdiocese of Anchorage later appointed Crowley as their chancellor, despite the Diocese of Lansing warning the archdiocese of these allegations."

The Anchorage archdiocese removed him from ministry in 2002 and he was defrocked.

"In 2002, the Diocese of Lansing shared information with the Washtenaw County Prosecutor's Office

regarding Crowley; the prosecutor was unable to

► **Neil Kalina**, 63, Archdiocese of Detroit, was charged in Macomb County with four felony counts of criminal sexual conduct in the second degree. Kalina, who was a priest at St. Kieran Catholic Church in Shelby Township, was arrested Thursday in Littlerock, California.

On at least four occasions, a boy between the ages of 12 and 14 "spent the night with Kalina in the rectory at St. Kieran's," said the affidavit in his criminal complaint. "On each occasion, Kalina provided John Doe with cocaine or marijuana, which John Doe ingested."

"On at least two occasions, when John Doe was twelve years old, John Doe woke up to discover Kalina with his hands down John Doe's pants, fondling his genitals," said the affidavit.

The incidents happened again when the boy was 13 or 14, according to the allegations.

► **Vincent DeLorenzo**, 80, Lansing Diocese, was charged in Genesee County with three felony counts of criminal sexual conduct in the first degree and three felony counts of criminal sexual conduct in the second degree, a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison. DeLorenzo was a priest at Holy Redeemer Church in Burton and was arrested Thursday in Marion County, Florida.

"On many occasions, while alone with JOHN DOE, DeLorenzo would first pray and then insert his finger into JOHN DOE's anus, penetrating him digitally," said the affidavit, describing his alleged encounter with a 13-year-old boy.

"In 2002, DeLorenzo admitted to sexually abusing a minor boy in the 1980's," said the affidavit. "The Catholic Church placed him on restricted ministry, but still allowed him to remain within the Catholic Church."

In a statement, the Diocese of Lansing said it received a complaint in 2002 against DeLorenzo of

bring charges," said the Diocese of Lansing.

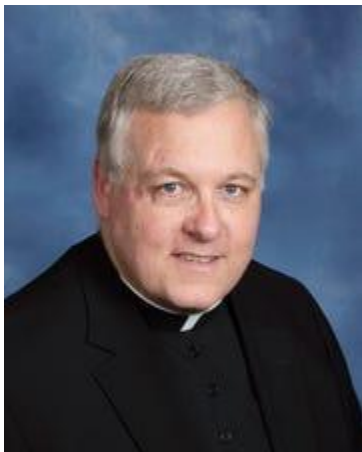
In a statement, the Archdiocese of Detroit said that Kalina "was ordained in 1981 for the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), which is a religious order that operates separately from the Archdiocese of Detroit. He left active ministry in 1993."

"The allegation against him was brought to the Archdiocese of Detroit in 2017," said the Archdiocese of Detroit. "Per our agreement with the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office, we turned over the complaint to the Shelby Township Police Department. In addition, we turned over the complaint to the PIME religious order."

sexual abuse involving a minor. The bishop then removed him from ministry and reported the complaint to the Genesee County prosecutor.

"The diocese has requested that Rev. DeLorenzo be laicized (defrocked) and is awaiting a decision from Rome," said the Diocese of Lansing.

Since 2002, there have been eight complaints made against DeLorenzo, said the diocese. The diocese said it forwarded May 2018 allegation to the county prosecutors and Burton police, and a Jan. 2019 allegation to the state Attorney General.



Rev. Patrick Casey, a priest of the Archdiocese of Detroit. (Photo: Source: Archdiocese of Detroit)

► **Patrick Casey**, 55, Archdiocese of Detroit, was charged in Wayne County with one felony count of criminal sexual conduct. Casey, who was a priest at St. Theodore of Canterbury Parish in Westland, was arrested Thursday in Oak Park. He also has served in Canton.

According to an affidavit, Casey is accused of engaging in sexual acts, including oral sex, with a man in his 20s whom he was counseling during confession.

One day in 2013 during confession, "Casey approached John Doe and told him to stand up. Casey then began massaging John Doe's genitalia before performing oral sex on him," said an affidavit.

The two talked about their struggles being gay and having suicidal thoughts at times.

"As John Doe spoke about his struggles with suicide and his concern about dying in mortal sin, Casey, who was dressed in black clerical garb, steered the conversation toward sex, telling him that he could not have a gay relationship and go to heaven," said the affidavit. "Casey told John Doe that he was also gay and shared a suicidal story of his own."

In a statement released after the charges were announced, the Archdiocese of Detroit said the allegation against Casey "was brought to the Archdiocese in 2015. The complainant was an adult at the time of the alleged incident. We removed Casey from ministry at that time and entered into the canonical process appropriate for this allegation. That process remains ongoing and is pending in Rome."

Casey is currently restricted from representing himself as a priest, said the Archdiocese.

► **Jacob Vellian**, 84, Kalamazoo Diocese, was charged with two counts of rape, which has a maximum sentence of life in prison. Vellian was a priest at St. John the Evangelist Parish, Benton Harbor, and now lives in Kerala, India.

Nessel said they're seeking his extradition from India.

According to an affidavit, Vellian penetrated with a finger a girl under the age of 16 in the 1970s. During one incident, said the affidavit, Vellian touched the girl's "breasts underneath her bra and clothing, explained that he was praying for her, and was 'trying to fill [her] soul with the Holy Spirit.'"

The affidavit says Vellian fondled and penetrated the girl's vagina several times before she was 16.

In a statement on the allegations against Vellian, the Diocese of Kalamazoo said it "learned today that a former visiting priest from the Archeparchy of Kottayam, India, of the Syro-Malabar Church, who served in the diocese in the early 1970s for one year, was charged by the Michigan Attorney General. We have fully cooperated with this ongoing investigation and will continue to do so."

In addition to the charging of five priests, state officials suspended last week the professional educationally limited counselor's license of Lawrence Ventline, a priest with the Archdiocese of Detroit, and the Attorney General has filed an administrative licensing complaint against him, said Nessel.

An abuse allegation was made against Ventline, but he has not been charged.

The Archdiocese of Detroit said the allegation against Ventline "was brought to the Archdiocese in 2016. Per our agreement with the six-county prosecutors in the Archdiocese, we turned over the complaint to the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office. ... Since 2016, the Archdiocese of Detroit has worked with the Oakland County Sheriff's Office, the local police department and the individual who reported abuse against Ventline. While restricted from ministry, Ventline is prohibited from representing himself as a priest."

In an emailed statement, Ventline said a "false claim" was made against him by a "demanding" anonymous person. He said police dismissed the case against him two years ago and notes that he was not charged.

In a statement on Nessel's news conference, the Archdiocese of Detroit said it "deeply regrets the pain inflicted upon victim-survivors, and offers continued prayers for their peace, healing and pursuit of justice. We continue to cooperate fully with all civil authorities, in the hope that these partnerships may pave the way toward a future of greater trust and transparency. ... We remain committed to preventing sexual abuse against anyone — especially children and vulnerable adults."

Nessel cautioned that the men charged are "innocent until proven guilty by a court of law."

"We will continue to investigate each and every tip that we receive," Nessel said.

Nessel said her office is reviewing hundreds of thousands of pages of documents and have received 450 tips. She said they have reviewed so far only about 5 to 10 percent of the information they have received.

Former Attorney General Bill Schuette conducted raids in October at Catholic dioceses across Michigan that involved 70 police officers and 14 assistant attorney generals.

[In February, Nessel accused](#) Catholic Church leaders of not fully cooperating with law enforcement, telling them to stop "self-policing" and allow state investigators to probe sexual abuse by clergy.

Catholic officials in Michigan say they are cooperating.

Michigan is one of several states that launched investigations after a report released last year by the Pennsylvania Attorney General showed extensive abuse by priests and cover-ups by Catholic leaders.

Sherman, the Deputy Solicitor General working on the investigations, said that as a Catholic herself, leaders in the "church hierarchy who have covered up sexual abuse do no represent my faith or my religion."

Sherman said the alleged abusers "acted to harm the people of the state, the people I serve."