



Diocese of Cheyenne

Office of the Bishop

To be inserted in bulletins and read at all weekend Masses on July 7-8.

July 2, 2018

Dear brothers and sisters,

This week, I sent out a Press Release about credible allegations of sexual abuse by Bishop Hart. With this tragic news, I recognize that the people of our Diocese are reacting with a range of emotions. Bishop Hart served this Diocese for twenty-five years, and in retirement he continues to reside in Cheyenne. Many people have developed strong relationships with Bishop Hart and appreciate his years of ministry. Those feelings are painful to reconcile with credible and substantiated claims of sexual abuse.

Others have been waiting for clarification regarding the longstanding allegations of abuse. Some of you have personally experienced the trauma of sexual abuse by the clergy. To any survivors, family members and friends, I offer sincere apologies. I am praying for you and will do whatever I can to foster healing.

As our Diocese deals with this heartbreaking news, I am writing to you so that everyone might better understand what has led to this present announcement.

In 1989 allegations of sexual abuse were made against Bishop Hart, going back to the time when he was a priest in Kansas City. The Diocese of Kansas City – St. Joseph settled many of those claims as part of two group settlements; yet there were no trials and no determinations of guilt or innocence. In 2002 the District Attorney in Casper investigated a claim that Bishop Hart sexually abused a boy in Wyoming after he became the Bishop of Cheyenne, and the D.A. decided that there was no evidence to support that allegation. In the meantime, Bishop Hart has consistently denied all allegations that he sexually abused minors.

Since the matter was not resolved, I decided to initiate a fresh, thorough investigation in December 2017. I asked an experienced outside investigator to conduct an exhaustive inquiry. He acquired new substantial evidence and concluded that the District Attorney's 2002 investigation was flawed and that two Wyoming boys were abused by Bishop Hart. Subsequently, I reviewed his investigative report with the *Diocesan Review Board*; and we concurred with the investigator's assessment that the allegations are credible and substantiated.

Therefore, in May of this year I sent the investigative report to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome. The offices of the Holy See at the Vatican will now determine whether this new evidence is sufficient for disciplinary action against Bishop Hart. While the canonical process is underway, we must respect this process which is aimed at listening to victims and the accused, finding the truth and responding with justice.

Because of the allegations, Bishop Paul Etienne had restricted Bishop Hart from celebrating any public liturgies in the Diocese of Cheyenne. I have continued the restrictions. With respect to Bishop Hart's ministry outside the Diocese of Cheyenne, the Congregation for Bishops in Rome has extended these same restrictions everywhere. Therefore, Bishop Hart is not allowed to publicly participate in liturgical services in any diocese. The restrictions on Bishop Hart are the same that would apply to any priest. If such allegations were made against a priest, he would not be allowed to function publicly.

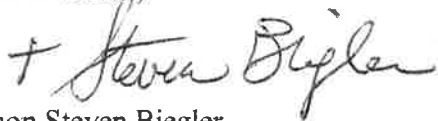
To the priests, I understand that this difficult news affects you in a very personal way. I too am deeply saddened and sympathize with you. Thank you for your dedicated service to the people of God. Let us renew our commitment to prayer, conversion, selfless love and celibacy as a sign of our total dedication to Christ. Please be assured of my daily prayers for you and for the deacons serving alongside of you.

To everyone in the Diocese of Cheyenne, I encourage you to remain firm in your discipleship and faith. Let us renew our commitment to serve the Lord in humble faith and to support each other with steadfast mercy. As St. Paul wrote in his Letter to the Ephesians, *"Living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love"* (Eph. 4:15-16).

I urge you to respond to this news in a spirit of charity. Please refrain from gossip. Rather, let us focus our energy on prayer and good deeds. Following the example of Christ, we must build up one another through the daily discipline of prayer and service. In this sad and painful time, please join me in praying that healing and peace will come to all who have been impacted by these allegations. Also, let us pray for renewed hope which the Risen Lord constantly gives us. Remember how St. Paul said, *"Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more"* (Rom. 5:20).

The abuse crisis in the Church has been devastating. As a Diocese, we have made a **commitment to protect and heal**: to protect the vulnerable from sexual abuse and to heal victims and their families. I renew my commitment to seek healing for all who have been hurt, while ensuring a safe environment for our children. If anyone has suffered sexual abuse, please contact the Chancellor Patti Loehrer at 307-638-1530 or the Diocesan Victim Advocate, Deacon Rollie Raboin at 307-532-4586.

Peace in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Biegler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop Steven Biegler
Diocese of Cheyenne