

# A Notre Dame Academy graduate alleged abuse by priests, then died by suicide. Over 400 alumni demand answers.

**Haley BeMiller**

Green Bay Press-Gazette

*Published Dec. 16, 2020*

DE PERE - Graduates of four Catholic high schools are demanding action from St. Norbert Abbey after its leader disputed allegations of sexual abuse lodged by a fellow alumnus who died by suicide in March.

The call for change came after the Green Bay Press-Gazette published an investigation detailing the story of Nate Lindstrom, who said three Norbertine priests abused him as a teenager in Green Bay in the late 1980s. Lindstrom received \$420,000 in secret payments from the Catholic order over 10 years until the abbey stopped sending checks in 2019.

Lindstrom, 45, killed himself less than a year later.

Over 400 graduates of Notre Dame Academy and the former Premontre High School, Abbot Pennings and St. Joseph Academy signed a letter sent Wednesday to the Norbertines and Notre Dame officials imploring them to address Lindstrom's allegations. Signees include members of Lindstrom's family and Anne Horak Gallagher, an actress and wife of U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher of Green Bay.

The Norbertines operated Premontre and Abbot Pennings in the Green Bay area before both schools merged with St. Joseph Academy to form Notre Dame in 1990. Lindstrom started high school at Premontre but graduated from Notre Dame.

"We know and understand that you are in a very precarious situation as it relates to all of this, but if you as an institution and community in charge of our children, and individually as Christians, don't acknowledge and address this situation then who will?" the letter states.

The alumni letter also points to the school's Catholic values and asks leaders "to call out individuals who walk among us that have broken the commitment to these values, harmed others within our community and tried to cover up their transgressions."

Notre Dame issued a statement to alumni Friday — nine months after Lindstrom's death — expressing condolences to his family and loved ones.

"Notre Dame Academy is a learning and working environment that labors to be free from all forms of abuse and harassment, and insists that all staff and students be treated with dignity, respect and courtesy," the statement said.

Lindstrom began receiving monthly checks of \$3,500 in 2009 after his parents complained to abbey leaders about the harm their son suffered from being assaulted by at least one priest. Lindstrom and his parents never sued or signed a contract, they said, and the agreement had no termination date.

"The only intention with this money was pastoral in nature and to help Nathan with counseling and personal expenses," former Abbot Gary Neville wrote in a letter to the Press-Gazette before the article was published.

Neville told Lindstrom in 2018 that the payments would soon end, and Lindstrom reported allegations against two more priests several weeks after that notice. The abbey hired a risk management firm called Praesidium to investigate the new claims and found them to be not credible.

The order agreed to provide Lindstrom with support for one more year, ending in May 2019.

In response to the Press-Gazette article, Abbot Dane Radecki published a letter on the abbey's website emphasizing Praesidium's findings but said the news of Lindstrom's death "brings much pain" to the local and Norbertine communities.

"Many are saddened, including me, because of the great harm caused by abuse especially by members of our community," Radecki wrote. "On behalf of the Norbertine community, I humbly ask for your forgiveness."

Radecki also pointed to the abbey's list of 22 priests with "credible" abuse allegations against them and said the Norbertines and Diocese of Green Bay have sponsored an annual healing retreat for victims and their families.

"Our community believes that the protection of children is the highest priority," Radecki wrote. "For the last two decades, we have worked towards rebuilding trust within the local community and acknowledging shortcomings. The Norbertines stand with accusers, victims and survivors, and those accused, working with local authorities to verify the credibility of each accusation."

However, the statement drew swift rebuke from community members and alumni who accused the Norbertines of covering up sexual abuse. Supporters of Lindstrom flooded the abbey's Facebook page with critical comments using the hashtag #IBelieveNate, and some shared their own memories of the priests.

An abbey spokesman referred a reporter to Radecki's letter and declined to answer questions. Radecki declined multiple interview requests from the Press-Gazette over the course of its investigation into Lindstrom's allegations.

Two days after the abbot published his letter, 20 of Lindstrom's friends and relatives gathered outside the abbey during Sunday Mass with signs from a previous demonstration that said "Stop clergy abuse" and "Nate's wrongful death." A police officer monitored the group as cars drove by honking in support.

"Things were not as they seemed back then," said Laurence Chetcuti, a Notre Dame alumnus who lived with Lindstrom in college. "We looked up to these people. We thought that they were great."

## Flanked by victims of priests, Attorney General Josh Kaul announces probe of clergy sex abuse

Haley BeMiller and Laura Schulte

USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin

*Published April 27, 2021*

MADISON - Attorney General Josh Kaul on Tuesday announced an investigation into clergy sexual abuse across Wisconsin, saying the review will help survivors heal and provide greater accountability for perpetrators.

The probe, which USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin first reported Thursday, will be led by the state Department of Justice and focus on abuse allegations against Catholic clergy and other faith leaders — many of which date back decades and involve religious officials who are now dead.

Wisconsin is home to five dioceses, including the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, and religious orders such as the Norbertines in De Pere.

"I would like to say to survivors of clergy and faith leader abuse: We hear you. We know how important this is," Kaul said at a news conference outside the state Capitol in Madison.

Prosecutors will request documents from the dioceses and religious orders as part of the investigation. Kaul, a Democrat in his first term, met Monday with Catholic leaders to discuss next steps and asked them in a letter earlier this month not to destroy any records that could be relevant to the review.

State officials and advocates also called on survivors of abuse or anyone with information to contact the DOJ's hotline at 877-222-2620 or visit [supportsurvivors.wisdoj.gov](https://supportsurvivors.wisdoj.gov). They hope to connect people to victim services in addition to investigating allegations.

"I know many of you have gone through this before," said Peter Isely, a founding member of the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests. "You've gone to the church. You've gone to the police. You've gone to therapists. I know how difficult it's going to be for many of you to come forward again. I want you to know this time is different."

The probe comes amid a renewed reckoning over clergy abuse in Wisconsin after the suicide last year of a man who accused three priests from St. Norbert Abbey in De Pere of sexually abusing him as a teenager in the 1980s. Nate Lindstrom received \$420,000 in secret payments from the Catholic order over 10 years until the abbey stopped sending checks in 2019, [a Green Bay Press-Gazette investigation found](#).

"We are here because this issue is not about individual crimes," said his wife, Karen Lindstrom. "This requires the examination of the entire organization that has enabled the abuse of countless children. We are here because Nate said over and over again that he never wanted this to happen to another child."

Survivors and their advocates have long called for Wisconsin officials to take action, contending any review should be conducted by independent authorities and not the same institutions accused of perpetuating and covering up misconduct. Wisconsin will follow the District of Columbia and [at least 21 other states](#) that have investigated decades of sexual misconduct within religious institutions.

More than 170 priests across the state have been identified as assaulting children. Except for Superior, all Wisconsin Catholic dioceses along with St. Norbert Abbey and the Society of Jesus have published lists of clergy with "credible" allegations against them. The total number of victims remains unknown.

"It is our obligation to look at what happened historically, what's occurring right now, and all with the goal of preventing this from happening ever again in the future," said Milwaukee County District Attorney John Chisholm. "So this is an incredibly important moment."

Dane County District Attorney Ismael Ozanne said he hopes the investigation is a chance for healing, even though it's beginning years after many survivors started coming forward. "This is entirely too late for us to start this process," he said. "But it's not too late to help finish it."

Diocesan leaders reacted swiftly to Tuesday's announcement, emphasizing that the DOJ review does not mean there are recent allegations against their clergy members. Officials in the Green Bay, Madison and La Crosse dioceses said they would review the attorney general's request when they receive it.

"We believe that the education, training, prevention and investigation policies and procedures that have been put into place over the past years in the Diocese of La Crosse have dramatically improved the protection of children entrusted into our care," La Crosse diocese spokesman Jack Felsheim said in a statement.

Kaul declined to offer specifics on the investigation or say whether his office would subpoena the dioceses if they don't cooperate.

Jerry Topczewski, the chief of staff to Milwaukee Archbishop Jerome ListECKI, said the church has taken sexual abuse of minors seriously, held perpetrators accountable and put programs in place to prevent abuse from occurring. He cast doubt on claims that an investigation would help survivors heal from the trauma they suffered.

“We have concerns about the negative impact this could have on abuse survivors, because the publicity has the potential to re-victimize individuals,” he said.

Topczewski also said the investigation seemed to be unfairly targeting the Catholic church. Kaul said Tuesday that his office is currently focused on Catholic clergy but will investigate allegations reported against leaders of all faiths.

On the steps of the state Capitol, Patricia Marchant said she was sexually abused by a Madison priest who befriended her family. She went to the diocese in 1991 after her memories surfaced, she said, but church officials waited until 20 years after that to identify her abuser.

Marchant asked other survivors to step forward even if the process seems frightening, saying it's not "on our shoulders anymore."

“You'll be protected, you will get the support you have deserved forever,” she said. “You will not be marginalized as my family was or blamed for having a righteous anger about this injustice or made fun of, actually, because we keep speaking about the unspeakable.”

## **Josh Kaul's clergy abuse investigation in Wisconsin is almost 2 years old. Here's what we know so far about the attorney general's work.**

**Laura Schulte**  
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel  
*Published Jan. 31, 2023*

MADISON - Nearly two years have passed since [Attorney General Josh Kaul](#) announced an investigation into instances of abuse by religious leaders in Wisconsin. Since then, the Department of Justice has been collecting reports from survivors and others with knowledge of abuse.

Here's what we know so far.

### **How many reports have been made to the department?**

The clergy and faith leader initiative has generated about 250 reports from across the state, according to a spokesperson for the department. Reports so far have included 198 individuals accused of abuse, and 74 individuals who have reported abuse to law enforcement for the first time.

### **When was the investigation launched?**

At the end of April 2021, Kaul announced the faith leader review flanked by a number of victims of clergy abuse and said the Department of Justice would request documents from the dioceses and religious orders as part of the investigation into sexual abuse.

The department has a team investigating each call made to the tip line, which so far has resulted in charges being brought in two counties against two men. Neither was affiliated with the Catholic Church or Catholic religious orders.

### **What happens when someone makes a report?**

When individuals make a report to the hotline or online, they're connected with a victim services worker who can steer the survivor to resources if needed. Then each claim is looked into by a team of people across different specialties, who decide if the claim can be forwarded to local authorities.

### **What has it accomplished so far?**

In May 2022, an arrest warrant was issued for 61-year-old Jeffrey Anthony Charles, who police say sexually assaulted a minor at a cabin in Douglas County between 2005 and 2010.

Charles served as the pastor for the nondenominational church Neighbors to Nations in Princeton, Minnesota, at the time of the assaults, but routinely traveled to his Wisconsin cabin with parishioners. He is accused of assaulting the victim four times over the course of five years, while the victim was between the ages of 3 and 7.

In February 2022, Remington Jon Nystrom, 33, was charged with one count of first-degree sexual contact with a child under 13 in connection with an incident that occurred in 2009. Nystrom was a counselor at a Mount Morris camp in Waushara County when, police say, he inappropriately touched a sleeping child. The camp is affiliated with the Moravian Church of America.

Two cases have also been handed over to Brown County investigators, but no charges have yet been filed there.

### **What about getting documents from the dioceses?**

Kaul said in an interview last week he can't say if he will use subpoenas to get access to files held by Catholic dioceses in the state. He can't simply go in and demand general documents, he said.

"We need to have probable cause that the documents would contain evidence, chargeable criminal offenses," he said.

The dioceses have previously said they would only release information pertaining to living, active members of the clergy to the DOJ.

### **Is the Diocese of Superior disclosure going to change anything?**

In November, the Diocese of Superior released a list of 23 credibly accused abusers, including one priest removed from the ministry in September over accusations from the 1990s. The Diocese said it did not plan on turning over any files or information regarding the priest, James Bartelme, to the department.

Kaul said his office is aware of the list and staff is following up on the information identified. One of the issues in that case, he said, is that the abuse occurred outside of the state's statute of limitations, which means charges may not be able to be filed due to the amount of time that has lapsed since the abuse.

"What I can say is that we're gathering all the information that we can and are committed to using the legal tools that are available where there is a sufficient basis to use those tools," he said.

### **Is this investigation only targeting Catholic clergy?**

No, Kaul's investigation is accepting reports and tips relating to abuses of power in all types of religious institutions. So far, the charges stemming from the DOJ inquiry have not been related to Catholic clergy.

### **What do critics think?**

Sarah Pearson and Peter Isely, members of the group Nate's Mission, said they still have questions, nearly two years after the announcement of the investigation. They want Kaul to be more aggressive in obtaining information from the dioceses.

Without taking more aggressive action, Isely said, Kaul isn't following through on the type of investigation he promised survivors before he launched the effort. There need to be subpoenas, he said, to obtain documents the dioceses have refused to make public in their previous disclosures.

While providing resources for survivors who report to the department is great, it shouldn't be the only action taken, Isely said.

"It's important, but not the primary role of the Attorney General or the Department of Justice," Isely said.

Pearson noted that Kaul said the Superior Diocese releasing its list was progress, but pointed out that internal investigation wasn't done by someone elected by the state to investigate crimes like these. The internal investigations by the Catholic dioceses in Wisconsin have been conducted by Defenbaugh & Associates Inc.

"Attorney General Kaul should be investigating this," she said. "Not an out-of state-firm from Texas."

Nate's Mission is named for Nate Lindstrom, who accused multiple priests at St. Norbert Abbey in De Pere of sexually abusing him in the 1980s. He died by suicide in 2020, nearly one year after the abbey stopped sending secret payments he received for 10 years.

### **When will the report be released?**

No date is set for the release of a report, Kaul said. The department is still receiving information from its hotline, and Kaul said he hopes to receive as many reports as possible before he closed the hotline and releases a report. He declined to say if a report will be released in 2023.