

Statement of the Archdiocese of Chicago on the Attorney General of Illinois Report on Clergy Sexual Abuse

December 19, 2018

“I want to express again the profound regret of the whole church for our failures to address the scourge of clerical sexual abuse. It is the courage of victim-survivors that has shed purifying light on this dark chapter in church history. Their bravery spurred my predecessor Cardinal Joseph Bernardin to establish an archdiocesan Special Commission in 1991 to examine this terrible crisis, and to develop a robust set of procedures to protect young people from predators and to establish supportive services for victim-survivors and their families. Those efforts continue today in the Archdiocese of Chicago’s Office for the Protection of Children and Youth, which is staffed by lay professionals with backgrounds in investigative services, education, social work, and therapeutic services. They work daily to protect and heal. There can be no doubt about the constant need to strengthen our culture of healing, protection, and accountability. While the vast majority of abuses took place decades ago, many victim-survivors continue to live with this unimaginable pain.”

– Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, archbishop of Chicago

The archdiocese has reviewed the preliminary report of the Illinois Attorney General’s investigation of the Catholic dioceses of Illinois’ handling of clergy sexual abuse cases. The nature of the report makes it difficult to discern which generalized findings apply to the Archdiocese of Chicago. However here are a few comments we can make:

- First and most important, we recognize and mourn the grave damage done to the many people harmed by clergy sexual abuse. We will always need to own and express deep regret for the suffering caused both by the abuse and the past failures to respond.
- Recognizing the need to help heal this harm, since 1991 we have maintained one of the first and largest victim-assistance programs in the nation. The assistance ministry and the help it offers is independent of the investigative process. We provide this assistance to anyone making an allegation regardless of when the abuse is alleged to have occurred, whether the accused is living or whether the allegation is eventually substantiated. To date, we have provided assistance to more than 400 victim-survivors and their families. We ask that anyone who has been abused by a member of clergy or employee of the archdiocese to come forward to receive the help and healing they deserve.

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- The Archdiocese of Chicago has been at the forefront of dealing with the issue of clergy sexual abuse for nearly three decades. In 1991, Cardinal Bernardin called for a dramatic change in our culture, and in 1992 the Archdiocese of Chicago established a hotline for reporting abuse and adopted policies and procedures for the safeguarding of children, which ultimately served as the model for the Charter adopted by the U.S. Catholic bishops a decade later.
- Starting in 2002, we have reported all allegations of child sexual abuse to civil authorities, and at that time we reported all historical allegations. We report these allegations regardless of whether the accused is alive or dead, a diocesan priest, an extern priest from another diocese or religious order priest. We consider an allegation to have been made even if the report is made anonymously, and we report it to civil authorities.
- We investigate every allegation against an archdiocesan priest we receive, regardless of whether the accused is alive or dead.
- When an allegation of child sexual abuse involves a religious order priest, we remove the accused's faculties to minister in the archdiocese, contact the religious order and help facilitate the victim's report. Each religious order is mandated to have a process for investigating such allegations.
- Since 2006, we have published the names of diocesan priests with substantiated allegations of abuse, and in 2014 we released more than 20,000 documents from these priests' files.
- When we learn of an allegation of abuse we act promptly, report it to civil authorities, remove the accused from ministry and investigate the allegation. Allegations are submitted to our lay-majority independent review board for investigation. To date this board has conducted 255 recorded meetings.
- Sexual abuse of children is a problem across society. Therefore, we conduct background screenings for archdiocesan employees and volunteers, along with a comprehensive safe-environment training program for adults and children. Last year alone, we trained 112,000 children in an age-appropriate manner on how to recognize, resist and report abusive behavior. To date we have trained more than 263,000 adults in 3,700 training sessions.

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- We have subjected our processes, policies and files to the review of multiple independent experts multiple times to help ensure we remain accountable and current in dealing with this issue.
- We stand ready to cooperate with all institutions and agencies that care for children and will share our experience and learnings. No matter where a child is educated or cared for, they are all our children and deserve to be protected.
- For more information please visit www.heal.archchicago.org.

History of the Archdiocese of Chicago in Dealing with the Abuse Crisis

In 1991, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin convened a special commission to review the Archdiocese of Chicago's procedures for handling accusations of sexual abuse.

In 1992, the Archdiocese of Chicago put in place policies and procedures to address allegations and issues related to sexual abuse of minors. It established a hotline for reporting abuse, created one of the first offices of Victim Assistance Ministry to provide direct outreach and support to victim-survivors and their families and created an independent office (now known as the Office of Child Abuse Investigations and Review) to receive allegations of abuse of minors by clergy.

In 1993, the Archdiocese of Chicago's Independent Review Board was convened to review allegations of abuse and to make direct recommendations on the accused clergy's fitness for ministry to the archbishop.

In 2002, the Archdiocese of Chicago adopted the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, including its "one-strike" rule that removed priests with even one substantiated allegation of child sexual abuse permanently from ministry. Every allegation, regardless of when the abuse is alleged to have occurred, is referred to the civil authorities.

Building on a decade of experience in handling abuse cases, in 2003, the Archdiocese of Chicago created the Office for the Protection of Children and Youth (OPCY) to bring together the various ministries within the archdiocese that had been operating to ensure the archdiocese is a safe place for children. Its offices work together to stay current on preventing and responding to child sexual abuse.

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Office for Assistance Ministry (OAM) personnel reach out and extend supportive services to victim-survivors from the moment they come forward with an allegation of clergy sexual abuse. This includes traveling throughout the country to meet with and listen to victim-survivors. OAM personnel also provide the opportunity for victim-survivors to receive independent professional counseling from fully accredited therapists. Additionally, OAM personnel have worked in collaboration with victims-survivors to respond to their need for healing. This has led to the development of the Healing Garden, annual Mass for Hope and Healing and Pinwheel Service for Child Abuse Prevention, victim-survivor led peace circles, and the Healing Voices magazine. To date more than 400 victim-survivors and family members have been served by OAM personnel.

Office of Child Abuse Investigation and Review (CAIR) is headed by a lay professional who provides a compassionate and thorough process for receiving and investigating reports of child abuse against archdiocesan personnel. Archdiocese personnel notify public authorities of all reports of possible abuse of any kind and from any date, regardless of legal requirements.

- The Director of CAIR serves as staff for the Independent Review Board, which is an advisory board for the Cardinal. The Board's main charges are ensuring the safety of children and determining a cleric's fitness for ministry. More than 230 Board meetings have been held.

Safe Environment Office personnel provide resources to educate archdiocesan clergy, employees and volunteers on how to prevent child sexual abuse, how to recognize sex offender behavior and how to create safe environments for children and youth.

Since 2003, more than 3,700 training sessions in the archdiocese have been held, training more than 263,000 adults.

- Archdiocesan parishes and schools are required to provide valuable training to children and youth on how to recognize, resist, respond and report grooming or abuse.
- Safe Environment Office personnel also screen, through name-based background checks, all clergy, employees and volunteers. Office personnel also receive and review fingerprint results for school personnel.
- All employees and volunteers who work with children and youth in the archdiocese must submit a CANTS (Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking Systems) Form.

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- All employees and volunteers in the archdiocese must abide by the archdiocese's Code of Conduct.
- The archdiocese requires Mandated Reporter Training for all clergy, school personnel, religious education personnel, youth ministers and coaches as part of the archdiocese's Safe Environment Compliance.

Priest Monitoring Program is the Archdiocese of Chicago's stringent monitoring program of clergy with substantiated cases of sexual abuse against them. These men have been withdrawn from ministry and are prohibited from presenting themselves as priests. They are required to comply with numerous restrictions to provide safety for the community, the program participants, and the Church.

In 2006, the Archdiocese of Chicago published on its website the names of all diocesan priests against whom there were substantiated allegations of child sexual abuse. The list has been updated as necessary. The list can be found at protect.archchicago.org.

In January 2014, and again in November 2014, the Archdiocese of Chicago, released documents from the files of the priests whose names appeared on our website list of men with substantiate allegations against them. Only the names of victims, material that would identify them or material protected by law was redacted in the more than 20,000 pages released. These documents can be found on our website at docinfo.archchicago.org.

In September 2018, Cardinal Cupich called for an independent review of the archdiocese's policies and procedures and the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation process to heal victim-survivors, their families and the community.