



ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

To the faithful of the Archdiocese of Denver,

In the summer of 2018, revelations about former cardinal Theodore McCarrick and the release of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report initiated another extensive look at the history of sexual abuse of minors in the U.S. Catholic Church.

For many faithful Catholics, I know how disheartening this was because there was a feeling that this issue had been addressed, so despite no current cases, why was it back in the news?

The reality is that even though we have spent decades taking steps to make sure our children are protected and that survivors are cared for, the healing process remains on-going and the work continues.

Today, as we wrap up an almost two-year independent review and reparations process, I want to provide my thoughts and reflections on what we have learned, and where we go from here.

When we engaged in conversations with Attorneys General Cynthia Coffman and then Phil Weiser about how we could cooperatively examine the Church here in Colorado, I entered our archdiocese into a statewide agreement to achieve the following three goals:

1. Offer a transparent accounting of the history of sexual abuse of minors by priests in our parishes including a review of how the archdiocese responded.
2. Provide a safe and simple means for survivors to come forward and receive support in their healing.
3. Obtain a thorough review and critique of our current prevention and response policies to make sure they are of the highest standards.

I believe we have accomplished those goals.

Transparency

Today's supplemental report identified five more diocesan priests with a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor. These allegations were received as part of the independent reparations program that invited survivors from any era to come forward and receive compensation from the Church. Special master Robert Troyer was asked to review these allegations and commissioned to write a supplemental report.

The priests identified today, with the date of first abuse, are: Fr. Kenneth Funk (1959); Fr. Daniel Kelleher (1962); Fr. James Moreno (1978); Fr. Gregory Smith (1971); Fr. Charles Woodrich (1976).

The supplemental report also identified additional allegations against eight of the priests named in the initial report for a total of 23 recently substantiated allegations in our Archdiocese. From both reports, our Archdiocese had a total of 150 substantiated incidents committed by 27 diocesan priests.

But importantly, the additional substantiated allegations continue to fit the same historical pattern from the first report, specifically, that over 85 percent of the incidents occurred more than 40 years ago during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and none of the substantiated incidents occurred in the last 20 years. There are also **no substantiated allegations against any current priest in active ministry.**

It remains true that nearly half of the total incidents were committed by one man, Harold White, and 70 percent of the incidents committed by four former priests. (White, Abercrombie, Holloway, Hewitt).

I offer no excuses for these sins of the past, or the historical failure to respond to allegations against Harold White and others, but the context of when the abuse happened is important.

While we can't completely rule out the possibility that there are more recent cases that have not been reported to us, the most recent known incident in our Archdiocese remains 1999. Through extensive media coverage of this process, multiple opportunities for survivors to come forward, and the work of independent investigators, we still have not discovered any substantiated abuse by our diocesan priests occurring in over 20 years. Further, any person who participated in the reparations program had to first report their allegation to law enforcement. Therefore we are confident that there are no priests in active ministry with known substantiated allegations against them.

As I have said many times before, we must remain vigilant, but this extensive, independent process should remove any cloud of unfair suspicion from our current priests.

Justice and Healing

While I cannot speak for every survivor, my hope is that this process has served them in their healing.

I know that for many, having to relive any aspect of their abuse was extremely painful, but I hope that the listing of names provided a measure of vindication by publicly acknowledging the horrible wrongs that were committed.

I further hope that the independent reparations program provided meaningful resources and compensation, with a process that was designed to protect the dignity of the survivors by putting them in control.

The program was completely confidential for those who wished to remain private, non-adversarial with no depositions or extended legal requirements, and run completely independent of the Church.

I will continue to meet personally with any survivors who desire to do so, and even though these specific programs have ended, we will continue to offer support to anyone who comes forward.

Protecting Children Today

Finally, a critical aspect of this process was to ensure we are doing everything we can to protect the children entrusted to our care.

Beginning with Archbishop Stafford in the early 1990s, and continuing with Archbishop Chaput and myself, we have taken many steps over the last 30 years to make sure our parishes and schools are a safe place for children.

Through enhanced screening processes, mandatory trainings on reporting and prevention responsibilities, and strict zero-tolerance and code of conduct policies, we have made significant progress, as evidenced by the significant decline in cases.

But it has been an invaluable experience to receive an independent and thorough review of our current safe-environment policies. The recommendations provided by the Special Master have allowed us to build upon and strengthen our decades of work and make certain we are using every best practice and that we are held to the highest of standards. Our children deserve nothing less.

Moving Forward

The conclusion of this process does not mean our work is done. As Catholics, we must re-affirm our commitment to never becoming complacent, and as a Church, that we will continue to pray for all survivors and their families.

The survivors of abuse who have come forward should also know that their voices have helped make sure that the Archdiocese is a safe place. We have endeavored to make our child protection measures part of the fabric of the Archdiocese and will continue this work to be a leader among all youth-serving organizations.

We also join the Attorney General in encouraging other youth-serving organizations to consider the review and reparations processes we have used as a model to address similar issues. Sexual abuse is a society-wide issue, and we are ready to share our experience and partner with anyone looking to enhance their own child protection and survivor support efforts.

May the spotlight on our past, be a light to guide others forward.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Samuel J. Aquila". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'S'.

Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila

Links:

[Read a joint statement from the Colorado Bishops](#)

[Read the Special Master's Supplemental Report](#)

[Read the Final Report from the Independent Oversight Committee](#)

[Archdiocese of Denver Promise Website](#)