



Questions and Answers

Information and Answers about Clergy Sexual Abuse in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and its Chapter 11 Bankruptcy Proceeding.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

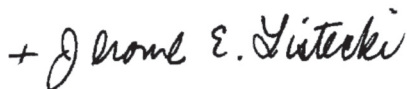
The Catholic Church's mission is to be a model of God's unending love. That's a pretty big mission to fulfill and unfortunately, because of our humanity, we sometimes stumble and don't quite live up to that expectation. That's especially clear as we examine the clergy abuse crisis and the impact it has had on the lives of so many.

Innocent children, their families, parish and school communities, as well as the Catholic Church, have suffered because of those who sinned by committing heinous crimes against innocent victims. For many, the faith that they held in people who represented the Church, as well as in the institution of the Church itself, has been severely damaged, if not entirely severed.

No matter how painful this topic can be, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee is committed to open communication about issues related to clergy sexual abuse of minors. Many important steps have been taken to help prevent such abuse from ever happening again. We continue to work to heal the wounds suffered by those affected by clergy sexual abuse; remaining vigilant in protecting our children and young people. We can never say "We are sorry" often enough. Our apology is sincere. We are truly sorry for anyone who suffered the horror of clergy sexual abuse, a violation of everything the Church and the priesthood represent. We remain grateful for those who remain strong in their faith, despite this awful chapter of the Church's history.

We hope this information assists you in your understanding of the facts about this important topic.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Jerome E. Listecky
Archbishop of Milwaukee

How many abuse claims have been filed?

Approximately 570 claims have been filed in the archdiocesan bankruptcy. The vast majority of claims allege incidents of abuse that date back decades, in some cases more than 70 years. Importantly, only one claim alleges sexual abuse occurring since 2000. As a point of comparison, there have been more than 40 cases of sexual abuse that we know about in our state involving public school personnel since 2000 – and those are just the cases where an abuser was convicted in court.

Have any new priests who are currently serving in our archdiocese been accused?

Some new names of diocesan priests did surface in the claims process. In those instances, if the accused is still alive, the claim has been sent to the appropriate district attorney's office for review. If the district attorney chooses not to pursue the case, the archdiocese follows its policies and conducts an independent investigation during which time the priest is restricted from public ministry. In addition, information in any claim naming a religious order priest has been sent to the religious order with a copy of that letter also sent to the respective district attorney. Claimants' attorneys have said that there are 75 new priests named in claims who are not listed on the archdiocesan website. What they neglected to say is that all of these priests are either dead or have been reported to the district attorney.

How do we know who these priests are?

The Archdiocese of Milwaukee has listed the names of diocesan priests with substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of a minor on its website since 2004. For priests who have been laicized, law enforcement officials and local parishes in the area where the laicized offenders now reside have been informed of the name and address of those on the list who reside in their area. Few, if any, other organizations have taken these courageous steps. Most importantly, no priest with a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor can serve in public ministry in any way in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

What about priests who are accused, but not listed on the website?

Individual priests who have been accused have rights in both civil law and Church (canon) law, and there is a presumption of innocence until a claim can be substantiated. In an accusation, anyone can say anything about anybody. That does not mean the allegation is true. It is unfair to accept an accusation as fact without going through a well-established and independent process of substantiation. If an allegation about a diocesan priest is substantiated, he is restricted from ministry and his name is posted to the archdiocesan website. It is very difficult to provide a sufficient degree of substantiation for posting a name when there is only one claim against a priest and that priest is deceased.

Are children safe in Catholic schools and parishes?

Judge Susan V. Kelley made the following statement during the bankruptcy proceeding: “My independent review (of claims) shows there is no public safety concern...none whatsoever.”

How does the Safe Environment Program Work?

Safe Environment initiatives include a training component for both adults and with age-appropriate content for minors. More than 45,000 adults who work with children, as well as students in Catholic schools and religious education programs have completed this education. In addition, safe environment initiatives call for criminal background checks on all clergy, staff, and volunteers who work with children. The program provides tools and training to recognize suspicious behavior. The Archdiocese of Milwaukee is committed to maintaining this program to safeguard our children. In place since the mid-1990s, the safe environment education and protocols are working.

What needs to happen in order for the archdiocese to emerge from the Chapter 11?

All claims to be considered within the Chapter 11 reorganization process have been submitted. Next the judge will determine which claims will be allowed to be considered for compensation and then a plan of reorganization will be completed for approval by the court. Catholics can visit archmil.org to access Chapter 11 progress and updates.

Why would the archdiocese object to claims that have been filed?

Some claims are past the statute of limitations and others are claims by individuals who previously reached a legal settlement with the archdiocese. Other claims are against a religious order priest or against a lay person who was never an employee of the archdiocese. Some claims describe incidents that are not sexual abuse. In each of these circumstances, these types of claims are simply not allowed under bankruptcy law.

But weren't these people abused?

Each individual's circumstance is heartfelt. Even if claims do not qualify for compensation under civil law, the archdiocese remains committed to assisting abuse survivors of diocesan priests by paying for counseling and therapy. Unlike a public school, public institution or private organization, we do this not because we are required to, but because our commitment in faith calls us to do so.

Why don't you just pay them a financial settlement?

Prior to filing for Chapter 11, attempts at resolving claims against the archdiocese were rejected by the tort attorneys representing abuse survivors. The financial resources of the archdiocese are limited. People sometimes speak about the financial resources of the archdiocese as if it were the archbishop's personal money. The financial resources were given to the archdiocese with specific intentions of donors to advance the mission and ministries of the Church and the archbishop must respect those intentions, while balancing the necessity of assisting abuse survivors. For example, all contributions to the Catholic Stewardship Appeal must be used solely for the restricted purposes of the Appeal. The two goals of the Chapter 11 reorganization are to fairly compensate victims/survivors with unresolved claims and to carry on the essential ministries of the archdiocese in order to meet the needs of parishes, parishioners and others who rely upon the Church for assistance.

That sounds like you are more worried about money than justice?

The best justice would be for those who committed these crimes to be in jail, but criminal statutes of limitations exist as well and prevent that from happening. What the archdiocese has done is make sure any priest who has a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor can no longer serve in public ministry in any way. Although abuse survivors tell us that money is not their motivation, the archdiocese has tried to balance the Church's responsibility and resources of those who have been harmed and those people who rely upon the Church for their spiritual needs and pastoral assistance.

What policies are in place for responding to new allegations of clergy sexual abuse?

Today, all reports about a priest who is still alive are sent to civil authorities. Since 2002, if a criminal prosecution by civil authorities is not possible, the archdiocese commissions its own professional, independent investigation, using professional, independent investigators (usually retired police detectives). The investigator's report is referred to the Diocesan Review Board for its review and recommendation on whether an allegation is substantiated.

For more information, visit
www.archmil.org