



Go Make Disciples

ARCHDIOCESE OF OKLAHOMA CITY

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Whose names are on the list?

A. The list contains the names of the priests against whom a substantiated claim of sexual abuse of a minor (a person under age 18) has been received by the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. The accused might have been a priest of the archdiocese, a priest of another diocese assigned to work in the archdiocese or a member of a religious order assigned to ministry in the archdiocese.

Q. How do you define “child sexual abuse?”

A. Sexual abuse of a child, minor or youth means any sexual act to or with a person under age 18 or other sexual exploitation of a child or other behavior by which an adult uses a minor as an object of sexual gratification. For purpose of archdiocesan policies, the term “sexual abuse” is not necessarily limited to the definitions of sexual abuse under civil or criminal law. The use, creation or possession of child pornographic images constitutes child sexual abuse.

Q. What are the criteria for inclusion on the list?

A. Clergy members’ names are included on the list if there was a substantiated allegation of child sexual abuse against them. Their inclusion does not necessarily mean they were found guilty of a crime or are liable for civil claims. Many of the allegations received by the archdiocese are from decades ago and were reported many years after the abuse, sometimes after the death of the accused.

Q. What do you mean by a substantiated allegation?

A. When a complaint is received, the archdiocese starts with the presumption that the allegation is being brought forward in good faith. An allegation is considered “substantiated” when the lay Review Board or the independent law firm concludes that the allegation is corroborated by independent evidence such as an admission, witness accounts, documents, e-mails, photos, texts, or other sources such as law enforcement.

Q. How many clergy files were reviewed and what time period did they cover?

A. The independent review by McAfee & Taft included more than 500 individual clergy files of priests who were in ministry between 1960 and 2019. The independent reviewers also had access to all archdiocesan files in all formats, including hard copies, electronic files and e-mails. The archdiocese also has begun the review of priest files prior to 1960.

Q. What percentage of all clergy whose files were reviewed had a substantiated allegation?

A. 2 percent.

Q. Can priests be added to the list?

A. The list is a complete and accurate representation of substantiated allegations of abuse that have been received involving priests who were in ministry in the archdiocese from 1960-2019. If a new substantiated allegation is presented to the archdiocese, the list will be updated.

Q. Why is this list being released?

A. The list was compiled and made public in an effort to be transparent and to provide parishioners, parents and the public information they need to maintain a safe environment.

Q. Why did some dioceses release their list of priests before the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City?

A. Several dioceses in the United States have been required over the years to create and produce lists as part of court cases or bankruptcies. Until this past year, it was not a common practice to produce such lists. Ultimately, it is most important that a list of priests with substantiated allegations of child abuse be thorough and provide parishioners and the public with the information they need to be safe.

Q. What was involved in the review to make it comprehensive?

A. The review included all related files from priests serving in the archdiocese from 1960-2019. It involved interviews with victims, witnesses, family members and former and current employees of the archdiocese; a review by McAfee & Taft of electronic devices and computers, including those of the archbishop and archbishop emeritus; requests of records from other dioceses; and additional research.

Q. How is the review independent from the archdiocese?

A. To ensure an independent and thorough review, the archdiocese hired the largest law firm in Oklahoma, which employs 175 attorneys in Oklahoma City, Tulsa and Springfield, Mo., with expertise in conducting corporate and institutional investigations. The archdiocese requested a non-Catholic lawyer lead the investigation and the files and investigation not be shared outside of the small group of attorneys handling the review. Attorneys were provided full access to paper and electronic files, electronic messaging and access to current and former employees for interviews. McAfee & Taft's independent review and report provides feedback on what the diocese has done well and areas it can improve.

Q. What funds were used to pay for the review?

A. The archdiocese used investment revenue to pay for the independent review.

Q. What does it mean for a priest to be laicized, defrocked or dismissed from the clerical state?

A. When a person is laicized or loses the clerical state, he no longer has the right to exercise sacred ministry in the Church. He is no longer referred to as “Father” and the Church no longer has the responsibility to provide him with housing, medical care or financial benefits. He will not be permitted to celebrate Mass or any other sacraments, except in rare situations such as encountering someone who is in immediate danger of death.

Processes, Training and Reporting

Q. What should I do if I know of a child being abused or if I’ve been abused by a representative of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City?

A. If you know of a child who is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1. If you have observed suspicious behavior and fear that a child might be abused by a representative of the archdiocese, call local law enforcement. Additionally, make a report to the archdiocese by e-mail at jgoodrich@archokc.org or by calling the Abuse of Minors Pastoral Response Hotline – (405) 720-9878. The Oklahoma Department of Human Services has established a statewide abuse reporting hotline – (800) 522-3511.

If you are an adult and were abused by a representative of the archdiocese in the past, Archbishop Coakley still encourages your report to the pastoral hotline, no matter when the abuse occurred.

Q. What happens to an allegation of child abuse by a member of the clergy once it is received?

A. Under Oklahoma law, all individuals must report an incident or suspicion of sexual abuse of a minor (person under age 18) to civil authorities immediately. If you feel a child is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.

In addition, the archdiocese provides an Abuse of Minors Pastoral Response Hotline for reporting the abuse of a minor (in the past or present) by a member of the clergy or other church personnel – (405) 720-9878.

Once a call is received, the archdiocesan victim assistance coordinator (VAC), a licensed professional counselor, will respond. The VAC enters a report into a recently established case management system, which generates a case number that improves record keeping and follow up. The system automatically sends the report to the bishop, vicar general and chancellor. The system prevents changes to the record and allows the VAC to ensure compliance.

A priest who has been accused of sexual abuse of a minor is removed from ministry until an initial review can be completed. If the allegation involves a minor, law enforcement will conduct the investigation. If the allegation relates to abuse in the past and warrants further review, the archdiocese will employ an independent investigator.

The allegation also is communicated to the archdiocese’s lay Review Board in accordance with its safe environment policy. The Review Board reviews allegations and presents a

recommendation to the archbishop. Members of the Review Board include an assistant district attorney, a retired law enforcement officer, mental health professionals and a priest. If the allegation is not able to be substantiated and is consistent with the recommendation of the board, the cleric may be returned to active ministry.

Q. Does the archdiocese work with law enforcement to investigate reports of abuse?

A. Allegations of sexual abuse against children are reported to the appropriate law enforcement and child protection agencies as required by state law and the archdiocese's safe environment policy. If the abuse occurred in the past, the archdiocese has developed a new protocol in cooperation with the Oklahoma City Police Department and the Oklahoma County District Attorneys Office to report, log and review new allegations of past abuse – even if the incident is too old to be prosecuted in Oklahoma. The archdiocese also may seek the assistance of outside sources, including retired law enforcement or independent investigators.

Q. What is the archdiocese doing to protect minors within the Church?

A. Any person who has regular contact with children during their work with or representing the Church in the archdiocese – including volunteers – must complete all necessary paperwork, interviews and reference checks; complete and receive an approved background check; attend safe environment training class; and receive a certificate of completion. In addition, all clergy, deacon candidates, seminarians and employees must complete the above steps whether or not they are working with children.

Information is shared with parish staff, teachers, parents and young people about appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops engages an independent firm to conduct an annual safe environment audit of the archdiocese.

The archdiocese currently has 112 trained facilitators who work with local parishes and schools to provide training and submit background checks. To date, facilitators and staff have conducted more than 33,000 background checks and training for any adult serving in any capacity in the archdiocese. The archdiocese has passed every audit – both remote and on-site – since the audits were instituted in 2004.

Q. Everywhere in the news, sexual abuse by perpetrators in all walks of life is being reported. It seems that some critics have singled out the Catholic Church for criticism on this matter. Why is that?

A. One instance of sexual abuse by a member of Catholic clergy is too many. As a Church, we should hold ourselves and our clergy to the highest standards. A series of articles on the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy in Massachusetts, led in 2002 to the adoption by the U.S. Catholic bishops of the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.” The charter mandated policies and protocols regarding the Church's response to allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy as well as standards for safe environment programs aimed at preventing future abuse. No other institution has undergone such a comprehensive review and reform. Because of those reforms, parish communities have become more aware and incidences of abuse have declined dramatically. Read about myths about clergy abuse at archokc.org/myths.

Q. What steps has the archdiocese taken to ensure that those who apply for seminary are suitable for ministry?

A. The application process for admission to seminary studies for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City is extensive and includes lengthy interviews, multiple references, national criminal background and national sex offender registry checks, and a psychological assessment that includes a psychosexual evaluation. Only men willing and able to live chaste and celibate lives move forward in the application process. While in seminary, men are closely supervised by a formation team and routinely evaluated by the seminary and archdiocese. They must complete their safe environment training upon acceptance to seminary formation.

Q. How does the archdiocese ensure that priests from outside the archdiocese, ministering here either short-term or long-term, are not a threat?

A. Every cleric from another diocese seeking to exercise ministry in the archdiocese has to present from his bishop or religious community confirmation that he is a priest or deacon in good standing, that he is of good moral character, that there is nothing in his background that makes him unsuitable for ministry with children, and that he has completed safe environment training, which includes a criminal background check.