

Cardinal O'Malley names 159 Boston archdiocesan clergy accused of abuse

BOSTON - Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley of Boston has released the names of 159 of the 250 Boston archdiocesan priests or deacons accused of sexually abusing a minor, including 22 whose cases have not been resolved canonically.

In a six-page letter to the people of his archdiocese Aug. 25, the cardinal said the decision represented "one more step forward in our efforts to assume responsibility for our past failures and reaffirm our commitment to assure that our present-day standards protect the children of our community."

The list of names published at www.bostoncatholic.org includes five categories of Boston archdiocesan priests or deacons:

- Anyone found guilty of sexually abusing a child under church or civil law or both.
- Anyone laicized after having been accused of sexually abusing a minor.
- Anyone publicly accused of sexually abusing a child but whose "canonical proceedings remain to be completed."
- Anyone who had already been laicized before he was publicly accused of sexually abusing a child.
- Anyone who died before he was publicly accused of sexually abusing a child or before the criminal or canonical proceedings against him could be completed.

Cardinal O'Malley also released a separate list of Boston archdiocesan priests who had been publicly accused of sexual abuse where the allegations have been found unsubstantiated by the archdiocesan Review Board or who were acquitted of charges in a canonical process.

The 91 names that were not released by the cardinal included 62 dead priests for

whom allegations were not fully investigated and whose names had not been made public earlier; 22 priests against whom allegations could not be substantiated; four priests or former priests not in active ministry for whom a preliminary investigation has not been completed; and three who had already been laicized or dismissed before they were accused and whose names were not made public previously.

Cardinal O'Malley also said he would not release the names of religious-order priests or those from other dioceses who had been accused of abuse while working in the Boston Archdiocese because other church officials were responsible for following up on accusations of misconduct against those priests.

"I hope that other dioceses and religious orders will review our new policy and consider making similar information available to the public to the extent they have not already done so," he said.

The cardinal said he had attempted to "balance appropriately several considerations" in drawing up the revised policy.

These include a need for the church "to be open about clergy accused of crimes against children in order to help foster the process of healing and restoration of trust," as well as the fact that former priests or deacons who have been laicized or dismissed are "no longer under the authority of the archdiocese" but could "pose an ongoing risk to children."

But the policy also takes into account that "in the present environment, a priest who is accused of sexually abusing a minor may never be able to fully restore his reputation even if cleared after civil or canonical proceedings" and the fact that a priest accused years after his death would have "no opportunity to address the accusations."

"I believe that, to the extent possible, our revised policy addresses the concerns and views that have been expressed, is consistent with if not more expansive than civil law, and best balance the considerations mentioned above," Cardinal O'Malley said.

The cardinal also wrote separate letters to the priests of the archdiocese and to survivors of sexual abuse.

“It is not easy for us to face the realities of the terrible betrayal of children and criminal acts perpetrated by some of our brethren,” he told priests. “With the commitment to serve the people entrusted to our care, always for the good and never to harm, let us go forward to continue the work of renewing the church.”

Cardinal O’Malley, who served as a Vatican representative studying how the church in Ireland handled its sex abuse problem, told survivors that “nothing I can say will be sufficient to heal the psychological and spiritual wounds you have endured.”

“No matter how frequently expressions of apology and remorse are offered, it is never enough,” he added. “You have shown great courage by telling a terrible truth, and we as a church must with sincerity and humility ask for your forgiveness.”

He noted that in his letter to the people of the archdiocese that most allegations of sexual abuse against archdiocesan priests do not report recent incidents but those that happened long ago.

“I do not say this in any way to minimize the abuse of minors by Boston priests, which is heinous, or the serious mistakes made by the church hierarchy in responding to it,” the cardinal said. “Nor do I seek to ignore the harm caused to survivors by these historical incidents, harm which is both current and the subject of our ongoing pastoral response.

“Rather I simply seek to place the problem in context and to give the faithful some confidence that the policies adopted by the church to protect its children starting in the early 1990s have been effective,” he said.

He reiterated the archdiocese’s policy of immediately reporting to law enforcement all allegations of clergy sexual abuse of children and outlined other steps taken to protect children.

These include “equipping children to report abuse; training our clergy, volunteers and staff to identify and report suspected abuse; conducting annual background checks for all clergy, volunteers and staff; and upholding the norm of zero tolerance by ensuring that no priest who has sexually abused a child will be permitted to exercise any ministry,” he said.