

Dear Friends in Christ,

From my earliest days as a bishop, I have dealt with allegations of child sexual abuse by putting the child at the center of my actions. In my experience, whether the abuse happened in the recent or distant past, the survivor speaks from the pain they suffered as that wounded and betrayed child. The Archdiocese of Chicago has long sought to heal them and prevent this crime from occurring again. I am personally committed to applying the highest level of vigilance to these efforts and to further strengthening our safeguards against abuse.

Today, Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul published a report (the Report) on his office's investigation of allegations of child sexual abuse against clergy in the six Illinois Catholic dioceses over a period of nearly 90 years. The Report addresses both how dioceses responded to such allegations in decades past and current policies that help ensure the safety of children and support the healing of survivors. We have not studied the report in detail but have serious concerns about data that might be misunderstood or are presented in ways that could be misleading. It is therefore important that we state what we know to be true. For example:

The Attorney General referenced 600 calls to his clergy hotline. To date not one has been referred to us for action – whether victim assistance, investigation or compensation. If any of the 600 calls contained an allegation it is important that it be made public.

The Attorney General claims to “disclose” 451 names of individuals with substantiated allegations. As to these names:

451 is all 6 dioceses and includes religious order priests and brothers.

451 includes the priests already on the 6 websites of these dioceses.

All who pertain to and were known by the Archdiocese, were reported to civil authorities and “none were undisclosed, none were ‘hiding in plain sight’ since at least 2002.” In addition, in 2002, the Archdiocese did a look back, disclosing to the States Attorney all previous allegations found in its files.

We do list religious found by their orders to be substantiated.

149 still “undisclosed” men are mostly religious order members who are not on our site; they are not undisclosed, and they are under the supervision and report to their respective order. Attorney General Raoul distinguished between dioceses and religious orders, saying “this was an investigation of the dioceses, not the orders,” recognizing they are different. However their totals include both.

Attorney General Raoul said the Church is more worthy of investigation because it is a trusted religious organization. We think all children deserve to be protected regardless of whether they are cared for by a religious or secular institution; it isn't fair or wise to focus only on the Catholic Church, which has made the greatest strides in this area.

Statute of limitations: we offer care, compassion (pastoral outreach) and even compensation to all who come forward, regardless of the statute of limitations.

Attorney General Raoul recommends outsiders being involved in overseeing our internal church investigations. We have had an independent review board with lay people overseeing these investigations since 1992, which is why the number of abuse incidents has dropped so dramatically.

We must think first of the survivors of sexual abuse who carry the burden of these crimes through their lives. On behalf of the archdiocese, I apologize to all who have been harmed by the failure to prevent and properly respond to child sexual abuse by clerics. Survivors will forever be in our prayers, and we have devoted ourselves to rooting out this problem and providing healing to victims.

For more than 30 years, the Archdiocese of Chicago has been at the forefront of developing and improving policies and programs to address the scourge of child sexual abuse and to support survivors. Our policies and procedures, first adopted in 1992, have served as a model for organizations and professionals dealing with this difficult issue. I hope the attention drawn to the issue by the Report will encourage those who work with minors to learn from our experience and take steps to protect all children from sexual abuse.

Here are some key facts about our efforts in the Archdiocese of Chicago:

Since 1992, we have maintained one of the first and largest victim-survivor assistance programs in the nation. We provide assistance to anyone making an allegation, regardless of whether the accused is living or whether the allegation is substantiated.

No cleric with even one substantiated allegation against him is in ministry in the Archdiocese of Chicago. 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. In accordance with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth, clerics found to have committed even one act of child sexual abuse are permanently removed from ministry.

The archdiocese has, to our knowledge, reported all allegations of child sexual abuse by clergy to civil authorities, including the oldest allegations. We report these allegations regardless of whether the accused is alive or dead, a diocesan priest, an extern priest from another diocese or a religious order priest. We consider an allegation to have been made even if the report is made anonymously, has incomplete facts (such as the name of the priest or parish) or is made by a third party, and we report all such allegations to civil authorities. It is important to emphasize that, to our knowledge, there are no “hidden,” “undisclosed” or “unreported” allegations of child sexual abuse by the clergy of this archdiocese.

Under our recently amended policies, allegations against deceased priests who have not yet been placed on our website list are processed by our Independent Review Board. If an allegation against a deceased priest is substantiated, the priest's name is added to the list.

When an allegation of child sexual abuse involves a religious order priest working in a ministry of the archdiocese, such as a parish assignment, we remove the accused's faculties to minister in the archdiocese, contact the religious order and help facilitate the survivor's report. Every religious order with members living in the archdiocese 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 on our website. In 2014, we published more than 20,000 documents from these priests' files. These documents remain on our website.

We update our website list as needed and have expanded it to include the names of religious order priests whose order has substantiated an accusation against them and who have been assigned to a ministry of the Archdiocese of Chicago such as a parish.

We conduct background screenings for archdiocesan clergy, employees and volunteers and implement a comprehensive safe-environment training program for adults and children. Over the last two years, we trained more than 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.

As is required by the USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth, (the Charter) we audit our parish and school safe environment programs every year and, in turn, the archdiocese's compliance with the Charter is audited by the USCCB.

Additionally, we have worked in collaboration with survivors to respond to their need for healing. This partnership has led to the development of the Healing Garden, an annual Mass for Hope and Healing and Pinwheel Service for Child Abuse Prevention, survivor-led peace circles, and the Healing Voices magazine.

We always seek to improve our child protection and victim support efforts. We have repeatedly had our processes, policies and files reviewed by independent experts to help ensure we remain current with best practices.

In addition to these steps, the Archdiocese of Chicago fully cooperates with law enforcement, including with the Attorney General's investigation. We have made our employees available for interviews and provided access to hundreds of thousands of documents. We are committed to continuously reviewing our policies and will carefully consider any changes recommended by the Attorney General. Indeed, the archdiocese has already implemented a number of recommendations the Attorney General made during the course of the investigation such as expansion of the parameters of our website list. More resources are available on the archdiocese's attorney general report response website.

I invite other institutions that care for children and civil authorities to join us in this work and consider adopting the procedures we have developed over the past three decades, so that all children are kept safe.

Let us continue to pray for all those harmed by abuse. Let us reflect the light of Christ for them and be messengers of His Good News to all we encounter.

I will continue to pray for you and your families as I remain sincerely yours in Christ,

Archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich