

# Grand jury alleges: Hundreds of Catholic priests abused thousands of children in Pennsylvania

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A Pennsylvania grand jury report, made public Tuesday afternoon, names 300 Catholic priests who allegedly engaged in sexual abuse of children and youth over the course of decades. At least 1,000 victims are identifiable from Church records, the panel found, and the number of victims is likely many times that figure.

The names of about two dozen priests are redacted from the published report pending a Pennsylvania Supreme Court hearing of a suit claiming there is insufficient evidence of their guilt. But the bulk of the names are made public in the report, along with sickening details of abuse.

Although the cases go back as far as 70 years—the oldest victim to testify about his abuse as a child was 83—the bulk of the documented abuse took place between the 1960s and the 1980s, and about 200 of the alleged priest-abusers are still alive. Only two have been prosecuted.

The grand jury spoke in scathing terms of the conduct it had uncovered. The report's introduction begins:

“We, the members of this grand jury, need you to hear this. We know some of you have heard some of it before. There have been other reports about child sex abuse within the Catholic Church. But never on this scale. For many of us, those earlier stories happened someplace else, someplace away. Now we know the truth: it happened everywhere...

“Most of the victims were boys; but there were girls too. Some were teens; many were pre-pubescent. Some were manipulated with alcohol or pornography. Some were made to masturbate their assailants, or were groped by them. Some were raped orally, some vaginally, some anally. But all of them were brushed aside, in every part of the state, by church leaders who

preferred to protect the abusers and their institution above all.”

The report pulls no punches in indicting the Catholic hierarchy: “Priests were raping little boys and girls and the men of God who were responsible not only did nothing: They hid it all. For decades.”

The grand jury noted that as a result of the systematic cover-up of abuse by bishops and other Church officials, “almost every instance of abuse we found is too old to be prosecuted.” The panel called for changing state laws that set the statute of limitations for sex crimes so that prosecutions could be carried out wherever there was sufficient evidence and victims were willing to proceed. The Church opposes this.

The grand jury reviewed more than one million documents, the bulk of them secret files from the six Pennsylvania dioceses it was examining (two others, Philadelphia and Johnstown-Altoona, were the subject of earlier grand jury investigations). The massive report is more than 1,000 pages long. Among the cases detailed in report are the following:

\* A priest raped a seven-year-old girl while visiting her in the hospital after she had her tonsils removed.

\* A priest forced a nine-year-old boy to give him oral sex, “then rinsed out the boy’s mouth with holy water to purify him.”

\* A ring of predatory priests in the Pittsburgh diocese “shared intelligence or information regarding victims,” created pornography using the victims, and exchanged victims among themselves.

\* A seven-year-old boy in Erie was told to go to confession for his sins to the priest who had abused him.

\* Abused altar boys were given special tokens of

favor to wear, such as gold crosses, which served to mark them out as preferred targets for further abuse by other priests.

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\* One priest abused five sisters in the same family, including an infant of only 18 months.

\* A boy who was repeatedly raped between the ages of 13 and 15 suffered severe spinal injuries, became addicted to painkillers, and died of an overdose.

When Father Ernest Paone was caught molesting boys in 1962 in Pittsburgh, the local district attorney halted the investigation "in order to prevent unfavorable publicity" for the diocese, because he wanted Church support for his political campaigns. Paone remained a priest until 2003, when he retired with a pension.

One of the most important elements of the Pennsylvania grand jury report is its detailing of what it called the Church "playbook for concealing the truth." In response to allegations of sexual abuse, Church officials were instructed to use euphemisms like "inappropriate contact" rather than rape; keep investigations quiet; shuffle off abusive priests to Church-run treatment centers; move predator priests to new locations rather than expel them from the priesthood; and, above all, never report crimes to the police.

The report was released by Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro at a press conference where he was flanked by more than a dozen victims, one of them a current state legislator, Mark Rozzi, who denounced the Church for opposing a bill to lift the statute of limitations for civil and criminal cases in the scandal. "These crimes were aided and abetted by the hierarchy that chose to protect the church's assets and its reputation, instead of its children," Rozzi said.

The Pennsylvania report is only the most detailed revelation of the sexual abuse that is a systemic feature of the Roman Catholic Church. Since the first revelations in Boston in 2002, there have been major exposures of crimes by priests and cover-ups by bishops in countries around the world, including Ireland, Australia and most recently Chile.

The former archbishop of Washington D.C., Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, was removed from office in June after evidence emerged that he had assaulted a

teenaged altar boy while a parish priest 40 years ago. McCarrick is the highest-ranking prelate to be removed for allegations of participation in child sexual abuse; many others have been sacked for covering up such crimes by priests under their supervision.



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