News



by James Dearie

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A new report on the sexual abuse of minors in the Honolulu Diocese, which covers the whole state of Hawaii, has been released by advocates of abuse victims. It outlines key ways the diocese failed to protect children, provides a list of accused abusive clergy with their assignment histories, and includes a 2015 report from a canon lawyer on abuse accusations against the diocese's former bishop.

The report from Minnesota-based law firm Jeff Anderson and Associates comes as Hawaii opens a two-year window for abuse survivors to file civil suit against their abusers and the institutions that protected them.

At a press conference accompanying the release of the report July 11, attorney Mark Gallagher, a Honolulu-based affiliate of Anderson's firm, cited several reasons for what the report calls "a horrific history of exposing children in its schools and parishes to sexual abusers."

The church was more concerned about its own reputation than protecting children, the report says; leadership failed to act when abuse was reported, and cases of abuse were treated as matters of church jurisdiction, rather than crimes.

Two other factors made the Hawaii case unique, according to the report. First, the late Joseph Ferrario, who served as a Sulpician priest in the diocese beginning in

1957 and as bishop from 1982 to 1993, was an abuser himself. "He had been a problem for a number of years, and yet he was elevated to the position of bishop," Gallagher said, adding that "nothing significant was ever done" about the reports because of the culture of secrecy in the church.

Second, the diocese became a "dumping ground for troubled clerics from the mainland," Gallagher said. He also presented a map highlighting the U.S. states, as well as several other countries, from which abusers came to Hawaii.

"Quite simply, the unique geography, location and isolation of the Hawaiian Islands created an environment that protected child sexual abusers allowing them to flourish at the expense of the children," the report says.

The report also includes profiles on the priests accused of abuse, along with a 2015 report from Dominican Fr. Thomas Doyle, a canon lawyer who worked as a secretary-canonist at the Vatican embassy in Washington, D.C., in the early and mid-1980s and was involved in the process of vetting new bishops when vacancies arose.

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In 1981 after the retirement of the previous bishop, the apostolic delegate to the United States began the usual process of finding a replacement and was alerted to several allegations of sexual misconduct against Ferrario that were passed on to the Vatican.

"The Vatican was informed that there were serious allegations against Ferrario, not only of homosexual behavior with age-appropriate men, but also with under aged boys," Doyle wrote in his report. "What the officials in the Vatican actually believed is not known. However they chose to ignore the warnings and appointed Ferrario as bishop."

Hawaii State Sen. Maile S.L. Shimabukuro, the primary sponsor of the legislation that opened the new reporting window, also made an appearance at the press conference. "I hope that those out there watching who might be victims of child sex abuse will have the courage to come forward," she said. "Now you have until April 2020 to file a civil claim."

This is not the first time Hawaii has opened a retroactive window for victims of child sex abuse to file civil suits against their abusers and the institutions that helped cover for them. Similar opportunities were offered from 2012 to 2016.

Shimabukuro's bill passed and was signed into law late last month

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