News

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The Archdiocese of Anchorage is launching an independent commission on sexual abuse to review all personnel files of those who have served in the region since 1966 and plans to release names of any Catholic church workers in their purview with credible sexual misconduct claims against them.

The move mirrors that of other U.S. dioceses that have launched similar efforts in an attempt to respond to the ongoing sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church.

The Alaskan announcement came just hours after Virginia's attorney general declared his state would also begin examining accusations of child sex abuse in local dioceses.

The archdiocese announced its commission Oct. 24, saying it was created by a decree the previous day by Archbishop Paul D. Etienne. It plans to review not only the files of priests and religious workers — both men and women — but also allegations of sexual misconduct by lay volunteers and employees reported to the archdiocese.

In a separate open letter to the archdiocese, Etienne said the review was in response to the Pennsylvania grand jury report released in August that identified 301 priests who had allegedly abused more than 1,000 children over the past 70 years in that state.

"The Commission will deliver directly to Archbishop Etienne a written report to include a list of all individuals to have credible allegations of sexual misconduct," the news release read. "This report may also include any individuals, who through gross negligence, failed to adequately respond to such misconduct."

The release also said the inquiry, which could take up to nine months to complete, will include "recommendation on improvements regarding Archdiocesan governance, policies, and procedures concerning sexual misconduct."

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Although the investigation will not be conducted by law enforcement, it reportedly includes members with law enforcement experience, such as a former captain for the Anchorage Police Department. Another member is a former prosecutor of crimes against children.

Etienne plans to respond to the commission's findings by publishing a list of names of personnel with "credible allegations of sexual misconduct committed against minors and vulnerable adults," according to the release.

A representative from the archdiocese told Religion News Service in September it was considering an independent investigation and not planning to invite the state attorney general to participate but said, "Should the [attorney general] approach the Archdiocese we would cooperate with their request."

Dioceses and archdioceses in New Orleans, the San Francisco Bay Area in California, Washington, D.C.,and elsewhere recently published or announced their intention to publish the names of priests with credible abuse allegations following the August unveiling of the bombshell report from the grand jury in Pennsylvania.

With Virginia's attorney general probe, as many as 14 states — including the District of Columbia — have launched inquiries into dioceses by attorneys general and local law enforcement since August. In addition, Kentucky's attorney general has expressed interest in beginning an investigation, and federal authorities announced

in October they are investigating dioceses in Pennsylvania and parts of New York.