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Bishop Christopher Coyne of Burlington Aug. 22 released the names of 40 priests who served in Vermont and were credibly accused of sexually abusing a minor or vulnerable individual since 1950.

He said he "asked that this report be compiled and published" because "the whole sordid tale of what happened in decades leading up to the U.S. bishops' 2002 'Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People' has not been fully aired."

The church in Vermont and in the United States, he said, have taken "significant action" to address the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and the cover-up of those crimes "by those in authority," but there is more to be done.

The Burlington Diocese's list was compiled by an independent, volunteer committee of four laymen and three laywomen assembled in November 2018.

"If there were a member of the clergy involved (on the committee), it would interfere with the notion of a completely hands-off approach by the diocese. This report needed to be done by laypeople who had no vested interest in what the report came up with in terms of findings," said committee member Mark Redmond.

"Transparency was promised and received," said Mike Donoghue, another committee member.

The committee considered complaints from 1950 to the present, as other dioceses have done, and was not bound by the statute of limitations in making assessments.

During that time, there have been some 420 priests assigned in the Diocese of Burlington.

"Honest discussions always were motivated by fairness — fairness to victims and their families and fairness to those accused. In reading these accounts of what happened to young people during critically formative years, we have been witness to how lives were changed in the moment," the report states.

The committee defined a "credible" allegation as one that met one or more of the following thresholds: natural, plausible and probable; corroborated with other evidence or another source; or acknowledged/admitted by the accused.

The committee members did not interview victims or witnesses, deeming that as outside their scope.

They did review files and complaints concerning priests that were assigned at the former St. Joseph Orphanage in Burlington, which has been the subject of media reports for child abuse by priests, nuns and laypeople.

There are two categories for priests on the list the committee compiled: those who were assigned in Vermont and abused children here and those who have been found credibly accused in another jurisdiction and have direct or indirect connections to Vermont.

The final list identifies all priests found to have been credibly accused based on information or evidence.

The list includes the priest's name, date and place of birth, date and place of ordination, dates of service, assignments and status (living, dead, removed from ministry etc.).

Of the 40 priests believed to have been credibly accused, some faced criminal charges, others were sued in civil court. Some resolved abuse cases before any lawsuit. In other cases, the time to file criminal charges or civil lawsuits had expired.

The committee members know some victims did not come forward for whatever reason, including lack of faith in the Catholic Church or in the Vermont criminal justice system. "It is our hope those victims may find strength now to speak," they say in the report.

"In addition to confronting the sins of the past, we must remain vigilant in ensuring these sins do not occur in the future," Coyne said. "I have listened to the stories of victims of clergy sexual abuse and will continue to do so. They need to hear over and over again that we believe them. They also need to know that we are doing everything we humanly can to make sure this does not happen again."

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The U.S. Catholic Church has put in place policies and procedures to make the church one of the safest places for children today, he said.

In 2002, the Diocese of Burlington adopted the bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People." It requires: mandatory reporting of all abuse allegations to civil authorities; removal of credibly accused clerics from active ministry; background checks of all priests, staff and volunteers; training to recognize and prevent abuse; and other proactive steps to ensure the safety of all members of the church family.

"As a result of our rigorous efforts, since 2002 there has been only one credible and substantiated claim of abuse against a priest in the Diocese of Burlington," Coyne said.

There are no priests in ministry in Vermont who have had a credible and substantiated allegation made against them.

Coyne assured that "as has been the case for the past 17 years, I, along with the clergy, staff and volunteers of the diocese, are committed to supporting and caring for all victims of abuse and will continue to work to ensure safe environments for all God's people — especially children, youth and vulnerable individuals — in which no form of harassment, sexual or otherwise, is tolerated."