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The Marianists religious order on June 24 released the names of 46 living and dead religious leaders who they claim sexually abused minors, the latest of several Catholic organizations to complete an investigation and publicly name the accused.

"For decades, despicable and evil acts of abuse committed by clergy and vowed religious of the Catholic Church dwelled in the shadows," the leader of the St. Louis-based order, Oscar Vasquez, wrote in a letter posted on the Marianists' website. "Hidden and ignored by church members and leaders, these abhorrent sins festered, stifling the light of our Church."

Vasquez said investigators looked at files of 2,500 U.S. priests and brothers dating to 1950. Of the 46 names released, 32 are deceased.

All 14 of the living Marianists determined to have committed abuse are on a "safety plan" and were permanently removed from the ministry, Vasquez said.

A safety plan details restrictions each member who abused a minor must abide by to remain a member of the Province. The plans prohibit unsupervised contact with minors and any form of public ministry. Unless the person is later exonerated, the safety plan applies for the rest of his life as long as he remains a member of the order's Province, according to the order's website.

"We pray that those in need of healing will find peace, and that this evil will never again darken the light of God's church," Vasquez wrote in the letter.

The Marianists, based in St. Louis, describe themselves as a "worldwide family of Catholic brothers, priests, sisters and committed lay people." One unique characteristic: Brothers and priests share equal status.

The order, founded in 1817, operates 18 secondary schools and three universities — the University of Dayton in Ohio, Chaminade University in Honolulu, and St. Mary's University in San Antonio.

All four Roman Catholic dioceses and archdioceses in Missouri — the St. Louis Archdiocese, the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, the Diocese of Jefferson City and the Kansas City-St. Joseph Diocese — have previously released names of credibly accused priests.

The investigations followed the release of a 2018 report in Pennsylvania that cited the abuse of more than 1,000 children by hundreds of priests since the 1940s and the efforts of church leaders to cover it up.

Following the release of that report, Pope Francis vowed that "no effort must be spared" to root out clergy sexual abuse and he begged forgiveness from the victims.

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