News



David Lorenz, Maryland director for the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, speaks at a sidewalk news conference outside the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops gathering in Baltimore on Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2022. (AP Photo/Peter Smith)

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Annapolis, Md. — November 18, 2022

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An investigation by Maryland's attorney general identified 158 Roman Catholic priests in the Archdiocese of Baltimore who have been accused of sexually and physically abusing more than 600 victims over the past 80 years, according to court records filed Nov. 17.

Attorney General Brian Frosh announced that his office has completed a 463-page report on the investigation, which began in 2019. He filed a motion in Baltimore Circuit Court to make the report public. Court permission is required because the report contains information from grand jury subpoenas. It's unclear when the court will make a decision.

“For decades, survivors reported sexual abuse perpetrated by Catholic priests and for decades the Church covered up the abuse rather than holding the abusers accountable and protecting its congregations," according to the court filing. “The Archdiocese of Baltimore was no exception.”

The report, titled “Clergy Abuse in Maryland," identifies 115 priests who were prosecuted for sex abuse and/or identified publicly by the archdiocese as having been “credibly accused" of sexual abuse. It also includes an additional 43 priests accused of sexual abuse but not identified publicly by the archdiocese, the court filing said.

“The Report summarizes the sexual abuse and physical torture perpetrated by all 158 priests and the Archdiocese's response to that abuse," the court filing said.

In a letter released the evening of Nov. 17, Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore apologized “to the victim-survivors who were harmed by a minister of the Church and who were harmed by those who failed to protect them, who failed to respond to them with care and compassion and who failed to hold abusers accountable for their sinful and criminal behavior.”

“Upon reading today’s motion, we feel renewed shame, deep remorse and heartfelt sympathy, most especially to those who suffered from the actions of representatives of the very Church entrusted with their spiritual and physical well-being,” Lori wrote.

David Lorenz, the Maryland leader of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, described the news of the report and numbers of victims as “absolutely horrendous."

“Once again, the church has lied about the number of abusive priests," Lorenz said in a statement. "Many parishes were dumping grounds for predators, some housed almost ten. It is very clear that nobody was safe. Sadly, it is no different than any diocese or secular report in the country.”

While the court filing noted that more than 600 victims were identified, it also said “there are almost certainly hundreds more, as the Department of Justice's Annual Crime Victimization Report has demonstrated that most incidents of sexual assault go unreported."

Both boys and girls were abused, according to the court filing, with ages ranging from preschool through young adulthood.

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“Although no parish was safe, some congregations and schools were assigned multiple abusive priests, and a few had more than one sexually abusive priest at the same time," the court filing said. “One congregation was assigned eleven sexually abusive priests over 40 years."

The sexual abuse was so pervasive, the court filing said, that victims were sometimes reporting sexual abuse to priests who were perpetrators themselves.

The investigation also revealed that the archdiocese failed to report many allegations of sexual abuse, conduct adequate investigations of alleged abuse, remove abusers from the ministry or restrict their access to children.

“Instead, it went to great lengths to keep the abuse secret," the court filing said. “While the Archdiocese reported a large number of allegations to police, especially in later years, for decades it worked to ensure that the perpetrators would not face justice."

In the court filing, Frosh argues that “publicly airing the transgressions of the Church is critical to holding people and institutions accountable and improving the way

sexual abuse allegations are handled going forward.”

“More importantly, it is vital to protecting children an the entire community," the filing said.

The court filing also noted that of the 43 priests that have not been publicly identified or prosecuted, 30 have died.

“For those priests that have died, this additional secrecy interest is less compelling," the filing said.

The attorney general's office redacted all identifying information for for the 13 living church officials who have been accused of sexual abuse but who have not been listed as credibly accused by the archdiocese and who have not been prosecuted.

In 2019, Frosh launched a criminal investigation of child sexual abuse perpetrated by priests and other employees of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Hundreds of thousands of documents dating back to the 1940s were produced in response to grand jury subpoenas.

As part of its investigation, the attorney general's office created an email address and telephone hotline for people to report information. Over 300 hundred people contacted the office, and investigators interviewed hundreds of victims and witnesses.