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Anne Barrett Doyle, co-director of BishopAccountability.org, holds a photo of ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick during a press conference in Rome, Monday, Feb. 17, 2020, on the occasion of the first anniversary of Pope Francis' summit on clergy abuse. (AP/Andrew Medichini)



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This February marked the fifth anniversary of one of Pope Francis' seminal efforts to confront clergy sexual abuse: the first-of-its-kind 2019 Vatican summit about abuse prevention with the heads of the world's Catholic bishops' conferences.

Looking back now, one of the leading U.S. advocates for clergy abuse survivors told National Catholic Reporter that although the summit resulted in "massive public awareness building" about clergy abuse, its wider impact has been "minimal."

Anne Barrett Doyle, who has tracked clergy abuse over decades as a co-director of the BishopAccountability.org website, in particular singled out for criticism Francis' signature clergy abuse reform *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, first issued after the summit.

"Its impact has been insignificant, as far as we can tell," said Barrett Doyle, speaking in an interview in Rome for NCR's "The Vatican Briefing" podcast. The survivor advocate criticized the way the reform law, which created a new system to evaluate accusations of abuse or cover-up by bishops, does not share with the public which bishops are being investigated.

Some canon law experts say the Vatican keeps that information private so as to protect the reputation of accused bishops while investigations are still in their earliest stages.

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"It resembles the laws very much before *Vos Estis*, [as] it is cloaked in secrecy," said Barrett Doyle. "We have no idea how many bishops have been investigated under *Vos Estis*. BishopAccountability tries to count them, but the information is so vague."

In her podcast interview, Barrett Doyle also criticized the structure of Francis' main advisory group on clergy sexual abuse, saying the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors has "an impossible remit."

"They're supposed to sort of be monitoring the church's progress in safeguarding without being allowed to probe individual cases," she said. "That's laughably impossible."

"The truth only comes out in the individual cases," said Barrett Doyle. "Literally, the devil is in those details."

"I think the commission has been exploited by the Vatican to make them look like they're being accountable to a semi-outside body, which it isn't, and I think the commission has lost credibility," she said.

The full episode of the podcast is available here:

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