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Milwaukee abuse documents' release set for July

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[Editor's Note: This article has been updated to include comments from the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests]

Thousands of documents related to clergy abuse cases in Milwaukee will be released by summer.

Archbishop Jerome Listeki made the announcement Wednesday in an email to Milwaukee Catholics, which was later posted on the archdiocesan website. In the message, he begs forgiveness from the victims, and "for myself and in the name of the Church I give those abuse survivors and their families my sincere apology."

"My hope is by making these documents public, we will shed much-needed light on how the archdiocese responded to abuse survivors over the past 40-plus years when confronting this issue and that they will aid abuse survivors and others in resolution and healing," Listeki said.

The documents will go public on the archdiocesan website by July 1. The archbishop's chief of staff Jerry Topczewski told the Associated Press that time is needed to redact victims' identities.

"I think what the archbishop has done is say, 'If this is what's needed for resolution, if this is going to help abuse survivors, then I'll authorize their release without the court being involved,'" Topczewski told AP.

The announcement came a day before the state of the documents requested released through a motion from abuse victims were to be determined in U.S. Bankruptcy Court, according to reports.

"The release of documents is something abuse survivors have asked for and if it can help us keep moving forward, I am willing to do it. Our response to abuse survivors, whether of clergy or others, will be part of

the mission of the Church forever," Listeki said.

The documents will include thousands of pages regarding priest sex abuse dating back as far as 80 years. The archdiocese also plans to work with victims' attorneys to create a timeline of events for each clergy offender. In a summary of what the documents will reveal, Listeki said that the vast majority of perpetrators were unknown to the archdiocese until years after the abuse, and that the majority of those reassigned after behavioral concerns never abused again.

In addition, bishops' depositions from the bankruptcy proceedings will be released, including Bishop Emeritus Richard Skiba, retired Archbishop Rembert Weakland, and Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the current archbishop of New York.

Dolan released a statement Wednesday, saying he is "pleased with the decision" to release the documents, including his own deposition.

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"As I stated at the time of the deposition, I was grateful for the opportunity to go on-the-record with a full account of how the Archdiocese of Milwaukee responded to abuse survivors, and to answer any questions that I could," he said.

"I stand ready to assist in any way that I can in the future. It is my hope that the release of these documents will also help in the healing process for abuse survivors, as well as their families and loved ones," Dolan stated.

While grateful that Dolan's deposition and other documents will be made public, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests expressed skepticism that Dolan answered questions honestly, "given his history of dissembling about clergy sex crimes and cover ups," said Barbara Blaine, SNAP president, on its website.

"Still, every bit of information about how the Catholic hierarchy conceals heinous crimes is welcome. We hope other current and former church staffers will share what they know and suspect about child molesting clerics without having to be forced to do so," she said.

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