

Milwaukee documents show church was slow to act on abusive priests

Marie Rohde | Jul. 1, 2013

[Pages and pages of paperwork documenting clergy sex abuse](#) [1] in the Milwaukee archdiocese were released Monday afternoon, providing insight to priest abuse cases over the years as well as New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan's request to move church assets to protect them from a bankruptcy filing before he left Milwaukee in 2009.

Jeff Anderson, a lawyer representing the victims of clergy sex abuse in the archdiocese, said in a news conference Monday that the newly released documents show that decisions were made to move \$147 million to a fund for cemetery maintenance and to parishes under Dolan, then archbishop of Milwaukee. Anderson said the Vatican acted with unprecedented speed to approve the transfer of the money.

Anderson said the request to move the money was made in a June 4, 2007, letter to the Vatican and was approved July 18, 2007.

Anderson compared the speed of the money transfer to the years it took to act on abusive priests. Specifically, he said, Fr. John Wagner was accused of abusing 10 minors, and though he admitted some of the misconduct, he remained a priest for more than seven years after the allegations were made.

Michael Finnegan, another lawyer for the victims, said he had received an email that Wagner has been laicized.

Anderson said Dolan at first minimized the situation then blamed the media and others. "The attitude we have seen demonstrated is the same we have seen demonstrated by offenders," he said.

Anderson also said the Milwaukee archdiocese had a long-standing practice of paying abusive priests \$10,000 up front and another \$10,000 when laicization is complete. Abusive priests also received salaries for a certain amount of time (which was not disclosed) and were offered full health insurance coverage for a year after leaving the priesthood, Anderson said.

Anderson said the documents show that one priest, Daniel Budzynski*, said he abused 30 minors, but records showed there were many more.

"As victims organize and become more public, the potential of true scandal is very real," Dolan wrote to the Vatican, asking for Budzynski's removal. The Vatican delayed at least a year, Anderson said the documents show.

Anderson contrasted the courage of the survivors to the "cowardice among the clergy at the top."

"There is no joy [in the release of the documents]," Anderson said. "There is nothing but deep, dark secrets among the most powerful among us."

**An earlier version of this story misspelled the priest's last name.*

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