

The revelations of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report and the questions surrounding the hierarchy of the Catholic Church's handling of abuse cases have left the religious community wounded and in distress. Many members of the Catholic Church feel betrayed, hurt, and hopeless.

Over 215 cities have been devastated by major sexual abuse scandals by clergy occurring before the early 2000s. Dating back to the 1950s, leaders in high positions of power in the Catholic Church have been covering up these cases. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court released a Grand Jury report containing the names of hundreds of priests and bishops who were accused of the sexual abuse of adolescents over the past 70 years. These cases have contributed to a culture where sexual abuse is normalized. This is clearly not a recent issue nor is it a localized one; however, this was one of the largest inspections the Catholic Church has undergone to date.

### What happened?

Released on August 14, 2018, the Grand Jury Report revealed that the Dioceses in Pennsylvania had covered up thousands of cases of child sexual abuse by over 300 clergy members, the largest known number of abuses by the Church in history.

The report reveals that internal diocesan documents hold records of over 1,000 identifiable child victims. The Grand Jury Report added that "the real number - of children whose records were lost, or who were afraid ever to come forward - is in the thousands."

The report further declares "Priests were raping little boys and girls, and the men of God who were responsible for them not only did nothing, they hid it all."

According to the Grand Jury Report, the first allegations occurred in 1947 and continued to be made, yet they were silenced by Church leaders. Despite the disturbing details of the report and victims'

# DECADES IN THE SHADOWS

For decades, the Roman Catholic Church has covered up thousands of sexual abuse allegations.

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abuse stories, most of these crimes can no longer be taken to trial because of the statute of limitations, "which forbids prosecutors from charging someone with a crime that was committed more than a specified number of years ago."

The Grand Jury Report calls upon the "Pennsylvania legislature to stop shielding child predators behind the criminal statute of limitations" and suggests it be abolished. Currently, Pennsylvania's statute of limitations law authorizes victims of child sexual abuse to bring accusations forward until they are 50 years old. Since 2002, fifteen states have removed the statute of limitations for child sexual abuse, while 29 more states have increased the amount of time permitted for victims to come forward with allegations in their statutes. Many other states are currently discussing making changes to, or even abolishing, the statute of limitations on sexual abuse cases.

### Why does this feel like an echo?

The Catholic Church has been shaken in the last few decades by the revelation of sexual abuse, and these revelations came to a head with the Boston Globe's reporting in 2002. That year, The Boston Globe wrote over 600 stories of sexual abuse. The Globe's Spotlight team investigated a similar coverup to the Pennsylvania cases. Over 130 people came forward with stories of their personal abuse by Fr. John J. Geoghan, a Boston priest who was accused of rape for three decades.

Most of the victims who came forward were schoolboys, the youngest only four years old at the time. The oldest allegation against Fr. Geoghan dates back to 1960, and he admitted to four cases as late as 1995. Fr. Geoghan was able to stay in ministry under the authority of Cardinal Law. He was asked to move to new parishes several times, but continued his abuses everywhere he went. He was removed from the priesthood in 1998. At least 70 other priests were exposed by the Boston Globe's Spotlight team in 2002.

"What I think is very different with what happened in Boston and what happened in this Pennsylvania

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report," comments Fr. Jim Goeke SJ, "is that they put all of it in one document that was published. So much harm and devastation described in one report, so much harm over a long period of time, I imagine it makes people wonder, 'Are my children safe now?'"

Adding to the controversy of the allegations is the fact that Pennsylvania is not the only state to reveal claims against priests, as many others are beginning to release reports. Many abuse victims and others who want justice are pushing for Grand Jury reports in their respective states.

### What is the Church doing now?

The Dallas Charter, also known as the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, sets policies which ensure the safety of children. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops enacted this in 2002. The Dallas Charter set policies for protecting children including: educational policies for volunteers, priests, and clergy; mandatory reporting; and background checks for anyone working with children in the Church. One of such policies mandates that if there is a credible allegation against a faculty member in a Catholic school then that teacher is immediately removed from their work and is not allowed near minors. The Charter has provided a technical structure to protect children and vulnerable adults. It also contains direction on reconciliation, healing, and accountability in order to prevent future abuse and in making prompt and effective response to allegations.

These changes in the past decade have helped contribute to the drastic decrease in allegations. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate shows a drastic drop in allegations from nearly 1400 allegations in the years: 1970-1974 to 22 allegations in the five year period that we are currently in. These 22 cases are still 22 too many, as zero should be the only acceptable figure; in response, Archbishop Aquila and other Catholic leaders and school teachers are determined to eliminate these occurrences all together.

### What is Denver doing now?

"Denver was on this eleven years earlier than most of the country, which is good. This is what should've happened," says Fr. Goeke. Denver's efforts to protect and seek justice for victims is evident--especially with Archbishop Aquila's response to the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report.

Archbishop Samuel Aquila promises that the Archdiocese of Denver takes sexual abuse in the church very seriously and personally by protecting all members of the Church community.

Aquila writes, "The Archdiocese of Denver can never fully make right the sins of the past, but we are committed to always being a part of the healing process." Each allegation will be accounted for, and priests will be immediately taken out of ministry, if they are accused of misconduct. Support for victims will be the main priority of the Archdiocese. Archbishop Aquila has published a website on the Archdiocese page called "A Solemn Promise" to allow transparency and encourage communication. Aquila has led four masses of reparation at the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Denver for the

sin committed by clergy members in the Catholic Church from September through November.

Denver Catholic Schools are also actively working to avoid sexual abuse, and have instilled programs since 1991 that support this cause. Every adult interacting with children is required to participate in Safe Environment Training, which has already instructed over 70,000 people with an average of nearly 5,000 adults newly trained each year. Additionally, a mandatory reporting policy was put into place in 1991 for Denver Catholic Schools.

These policies have been effective in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Denver, as a letter from the Superintendent of Catholic Schools, Elias J. Moo, claims. His letter states that Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Denver are required to train adults to report concerns, allow students to feel comfortable coming forward, and keep boundaries in place to ensure that no child is left vulnerable at any time.

President of Regis Jesuit, Mr. David Card '87 also stated that “all Regis Jesuit employees must complete a background check and receive a safe environment training, “Protecting God’s Children” in order to work at Regis Jesuit. We are also trained as mandatory reporters of any type of child abuse.” He adds, “More importantly, our charge is to love one another--especially our children--in everything we do.”

Fr. Goeke discussed that there are circumstances that he is very self-conscious about in the current climate. For example, a few days after the Pennsylvania report came out detailing clergy sexual abuse there, Fr. Goeke found himself in a situation where as one of the cross country coaches, he was accompanying two cross country runners on a four-mile run. They were the final two runners in the group that started from school. One of the runners needed to cut the run short; the other really needed to go the whole distance to benefit from the workout. Fr. Goeke was faced with a decision. Should he encourage the one runner to complete the run, meaning that she would run the final two miles alone with him, since she had never run this course previously? Or send her back with the other runner? He encouraged her to go the full distance. Reflecting afterwards, although everything was innocent and completely harmless, he worried about perceptions. What would others think if this student tells her family or friends that she ran alone with a priest for two miles? He remarked, “I wish I didn’t have to think about these things, but I do.”

Despite the Archdiocese of Denver’s responses to the tragic revelations, many are demanding political action to deliver justice to the victims and survivors of this abuse. Jeb Barrett, leader of the Denver chapter of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), says, “The Catholic Church has to surrender its immunity [to] an external examination of its internal records because they have been hiding sexual assault for centuries.”

Many believe that the Church must reveal all records of sexual abuse in order to overcome it. As Mr. Tricco said, “if we don’t know all of the issues, all of the problems, all of the hurt, all of the suffering and pain, it’s hard to begin healing in all of those areas.”

## What do we do now?

Within the Catholic environment of priests, teachers, and students, Regis Jesuit wants to spark change in the Catholic Church starting with the student body. Regis Jesuit dedicated a week of prayer and conversation about this topic to help the community reflect and to promote a call to action. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, a student-led rosary, and three open-dialogue meetings were all part of Regis Jesuit’s response.

New principal, Mr. Jimmy Tricco describes how his faith was shaken when The Boston Globe revealed the abuses in 2002. His experience especially resonates with students and faculty at Regis Jesuit after cover-ups have been revealed yet again with the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report.

Around 40% percent of Regis Jesuit student body and faculty are not practicing Catholics, but we are called as church and community to respond to this together. Regis Jesuit wants to provide for the needs of all students, no matter their faith.

In order to help everyone, Mr. Tricco says, “I hope people [at Regis] who are not Catholic can see that one, the Church did something terribly wrong. However, I think there are still a lot of good people in the Church that want to right that wrong, and bring healing and peace. [And two,] that the Church stands for something more than the people trying to live out its mission day to day.” With the #MeToo Movement and the Church abuse scandal co-occurring, dialogue surrounding sexual abuse and assault has become a more persistent and intensified discussion in our society. From seven-decade long whispers of abuse to a larger international dialogue, the sexual abuse within the Catholic Church has instigated immense pain and confusion among its members and the non-Catholic community alike.

Girls Division theology teacher, Mrs. Ortiz has also experienced great pain and confusion but expresses the imperative nature of her mission to reconciliation and healing. As she voices, “I have a God-given conscience and I will speak it, because I have a right and duty to, and if I am not being listened to I will speak louder.”

There is no doubt of an urgent need for action. Trauma has led to uncertainty, causing people to doubt the Church and Catholic institutions. Dr. Kabadi, the Assistant Principal for Mission, Ministry & Diversity, feels that despite the despair of the situation, we are not called to live in that brokenness. He puts it best: “As horrific and painful at it is, we don’t want to forget this. We want redemption. We want hope.”