

# ST. JAMES CATHEDRAL

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May 17, 2009

Dear Friends,

Just when you may have thought that the endless and tragic ordeal of the clerical sexual abuse scandals might be over, the Archdiocese of Seattle is back on the front page. I hope it will be helpful if I share a few things with you to help give perspective.

1. The present case being tried in court involves Patrick O'Donnell, a Spokane priest (at the time; he is no longer a priest) who was in residence at St. Paul's parish in the 1970's while pursuing graduate studies at the University of Washington.
2. In allowing O'Donnell to live at St. Paul's rectory, Archbishop Hunthausen, who was Archbishop at the time, was acting in completely good faith. The bishop of Spokane told him absolutely nothing regarding this priest's personal history, including the fact that he was a serial child molester who had abused young boys while serving in more than one parish in Spokane. Archbishop Hunthausen's understanding was that O'Donnell had come to Seattle to pursue graduate studies at the University of Washington. Had the Archbishop been informed about O'Donnell's exceedingly troubled history, he would not have allowed him to stay in one of our parishes.
3. While at St. Paul's, O'Donnell sexually abused the two individuals who have brought suit against the Archdiocese. Their attorneys contend that Archbishop Hunthausen knew or should have known that O'Donnell was a child molester. The Archbishop categorically and unequivocally denies this.
4. Anyone who knows Archbishop Hunthausen knows him for the man of God he is: an honest, genuinely holy man of unimpeachable integrity. Speaking for myself, I worked very closely with Archbishop Hunthausen as his Chancellor and Vicar General for nearly twelve years, and I have known him for the better part of forty years, and I can say without any hesitation that Archbishop Hunthausen is constitutionally incapable of misrepresenting the truth. That is probably true of few, if any, people I have known over the years but it is unquestionably true of him.
5. Archbishop Hunthausen is widely acknowledged as one of the first bishops in this country to take honest, methodical, and energetic steps to address the whole matter of clergy sexual abuse. In the mid-1980's when the American bishops were first provided in-depth education in this matter – including its criminal nature and its incurability – Archbishop Hunthausen immediately took steps to put into place enlightened policies and procedures involving experts in the field

and a lay review board. Rather quickly, the Seattle protocols for dealing with clergy sexual abuse became a model for the nation – a model, had it been followed by all the dioceses and Archdioceses – would have eliminated many of the tragic situations the Church is having to deal with today.

6. Archbishop Brunett has asked me to sit in on the trial. It seems best that there be a priest sitting at the table along with the Archdiocesan lawyers. I am happy to do so in order to support the Archdiocese and Archbishop Hunthausen who will be testifying this coming week. Somewhat unexpectedly, the plaintiffs' attorneys called me to testify this past week because I was one of the priests who served on a board that assisted the Archbishop in the placement of priests in the 1970's and 1980's. I, of course, along with the other priests on that board, had no more knowledge of O'Donnell's sad history than the Archbishop.

I hope this is helpful. In closing, I would ask that you keep Patrick O'Donnell's victims in your prayers now and in the days to come. I would also ask that you pray that the truth will prevail in this trial. One can never be certain in a case like this that it will, but if it does, the Archdiocese has nothing whatever to fear.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Very Reverend Michael G. Ryan  
Pastor