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THE TRUTH WELL TOLD

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Code words, cover-up

Gallup clergy sex abuse file now online

By Elizabeth Hardin-Burrola
Independent correspondent

WINSLOW, Ariz. — It's all about code words, according to Patrick J. Wall.

Wall, a canon lawyer and former Catholic priest and Benedictine monk, was in Winslow on Wednesday talking about the Diocese of Gallup's recently released personnel file on the late Clement A. Hageman, whom diocesan officials have admitted was a pedophile priest.

The 156-pages of documents, while filled with references to the priest's chronic alcoholism, are also filled with church code words for sexual abuse, Wall said. Some of those references aren't even subtle — "guilty of play-

ing with boys" and the Latin phrase "cum pueris," which means "with boys" — while others are more euphemistic — "the other trouble," "old transgressions," and "his difficulty."

"There's enough in this file you could write a whole story alone on code words," Wall said.

A co-author of "Sex, Priests and Secret Codes," Wall is an authority on clergy sex abuse and is an advocate for abuse survivors. Joelle Casteix, a survivor of clergy sex abuse and the western regional director for the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, joined Wall in Winslow. Wall and Casteix,

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Victim's rights advocates Patrick Wall and Joelle Casteix speak during a news conference in Winslow Wednesday.



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along with Arizona SNAP representative Joseph Baca, met with news reporters in front of the Madre de Dios Church to discuss the importance of the Hageman file.

Hageman, who died in 1975, was once a pastor at Madre de Dios, a parish that has had at least four credibly accused priests. Across Winslow's railroad tracks, St. Joseph's has had at least three more. Wall, Casteix and Baca held a similar event on Tuesday in Kingman, Ariz., in front of another former parish of Hageman's.

Phoenix attorney Robert Pastor obtained the Hageman documents while in the discovery phase of a lawsuit against the Diocese of Gallup, the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, and the Diocese of Corpus Christi. Pastor represents a man who said Hageman abused him at Holbrook's Catholic Church in the early 1950s. Pastor said other Hageman victims have since come forward, and he has passed on copies of the documents to those

victims, including Baca.

As representatives of SNAP, Baca and Casteix have now posted all the Hageman documents on the Bishop Accountability website. They can be found under "What's New and Noteworthy" or by clicking on the initial "H" for Hageman's surname.

Baca said it was painful to read the file because it clearly indicates the problems with Hageman stretched back at least to the 1920s. If church officials had dealt with Hageman then, Baca said, he would have been spared abuse by Hageman in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

"My first impression was I shouldn't have been abused," he said.

Wall said the file indicates Hageman's Corpus Christi bishop discussed with others the canonical options of forcing Hageman to live in a monastery for the rest of his life or making him apply for laicization, but the bishop did neither. Instead, he eventually sent an encouraging telegram to Gallup Bishop Bernard T. Espelage: "Archbish-

op Gerken told you right believe man might be given a chance would be impossible around here case too well known around here try him out maybe might prove trustworthy at last."

Casteix said she believes the Diocese of Gallup's willingness to give Hageman repeated chances for 35 years has had devastating costs for Hageman's victims across Northern Arizona.

"They decimated the community. They decimated the social services system. And they created two, three generations of destroyed, broken people," she said.

"Survivors are always in various stages of healing," Casteix added, explaining that many of the Diocese of Gallup's victims of clergy abuse have also fallen victim to suicide, alcoholism and other self-destructive behaviors.

While Wall and Casteix were speaking to other media representatives, Winslow's current priest, the Rev. Frank Chacon, showed up for a morning walk. He said the community had the "worst history" in terms of clergy sexual abuse in Gallup's

Catholic parishes.

"It's a real painful situation," Chacon said. "You can't undo the past, but you can help things go forward."

Remembering the Catholic community's response to the 2005 Mass of Reconciliation for victims by the late Bishop Donald E. Pelotte, Chacon said, "Those who were willing to come forward... have done so. The others don't want any publicity."

Perhaps echoing Chacon's words was the presence of a middle-aged Hispanic man who stood at the far edge of the church's parking lot, watching the media interviews in the company of a friend. Baca said the man had been abused by James M. Burns, another pedophile priest assigned to Winslow.

"He doesn't want to talk," Baca said after speaking with the man. "He just wants to be here."

*Information: www.bishop-accountability.org
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Joe Baca stands in front of the Madre de Dios Catholic Church in Winslow during a news conference Wednesday. Baca says he was abused by priest Clement Hageman at the church when he was a child.