

# NORTHWEST CATHOLIC

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## ARCHDIOCESE SETTLES THREE ABUSE CASES FROM 1960S, '70S AND '80S

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SEATTLE – The Archdiocese of Seattle has reached settlements totaling just over \$2 million in three separate cases involving allegations of sexual abuse against four priests of the archdiocese.

During the past six months, settlements were reached in the following cases:

- Allegations of sexual abuse by Father Dennis Champagne and Father Michael C. OBrien at St. Michael Parish in Snohomish in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The settlement was reached July 16, 2020. Champagne, who was pastor from 1979 until 1999, was put on administrative leave in 2002 after the archdiocese received an allegation of sexual abuse. He remained on administrative leave until a canonical process was completed, then was placed on permanent prayer and penance, removing him from ministry. OBrien was St. Michael's pastor from 1974 to 1979. After the archdiocese received a credible complaint of sexual abuse, a canonical process was completed, and in 2010 OBrien was laicized (returned to the lay state).
  
- An allegation of sexual abuse by Father Paul Conn, who served as parochial vicar at Queen of Angels Parish in Port Angeles from 1985 to 1988. In 1988, the archdiocese learned of the sexual abuse allegations and facilitated a report to the police. Conn was arrested and charged, pled guilty to six counts of indecent liberties and served time in prison. From the time of his arrest until 2005, he was not allowed to serve as a priest, and in 2005 he was laicized. The archdiocese reached a settlement in the case on November 19, 2020.
  
- An allegation of sexual abuse by Father James Knelleken in the early 1960s at then-Immaculate Conception Parish (now St. Lawrence) in Raymond. Knelleken served as pastor there from 1958 until 1964. In 1988, the archdiocese put Knelleken on administrative leave after receiving a complaint of sexual abuse. He remained on administrative leave until his retirement in 1989, when he was barred from ministry; he was laicized in 1996. The archdiocese reached a settlement in the case on December 28, 2020.

### **Commitment to transparency**

Champagne, OBrien, Conn and Knelleken were included on the archdiocese's "List of Clergy and Religious Brothers and Sisters for Whom Allegations of Sexual Abuse of a Minor Have Been Admitted, Established or Determined to be Credible" when the list was originally published in January 2016.

As part of its commitment to transparency, the Archdiocese of Seattle established a [Protect and Heal](#) website to provide information about the history of sexual abuse in the archdiocese, which peaked in 1975

and has since sharply declined. The website also outlines how, since the early 1980s, the archdiocese has taken steps to prevent abuse, protect the community and help victims and their families heal.

To report any suspicion of abuse by any Catholic Church personnel, please contact local law enforcement. In addition, anyone who has knowledge of misconduct by a member of the clergy, an employee or volunteer of the Archdiocese of Seattle is urged to call the archdiocesan hotline at 1-800-446-7762.

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