

Fact Sheet by Bishop **Accountability.org**

Six Ways Cardinal Sean O'Malley Has Mishandled the Abuse Crisis

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When Cardinal O'Malley is described as *papabile*, his work on sexual abuse cases as a bishop is often cited. While O'Malley has considerable experience as a “fixer” in the troubled dioceses of Fall River MA, Palm Beach FL, and Boston, his performance in that role raises concerns. A close look at the cardinal reveals a career-long pattern of resisting disclosure of information, reinstating priests of dubious suitability, and negotiating mass settlements that are among the least generous in the history of the crisis.

1. Cardinal O'Malley omitted at least 161 names from his published list of accused Boston priests.

As Boston archbishop, Cardinal O'Malley has disclosed minimal information about accused priests. He did not release a list of accused priests until August 2011, years after committing to do so, and then **he re-packaged information that was already public**: his list did not reveal the name of even one accused priest who was not already known. In fact, he admitted to withholding the names of 91 accused archdiocesan priests – even though the archdiocese had settled with some of their victims and regarded the allegations as ‘compelling and credible.’ [See [O'Malley's August 25, 2011 letter](#).]

And unlike at least 10 of [more than 25 other US bishops](#) who have released lists, **O'Malley refused also to name accused religious order clerics**. According to a [Boston Globe investigation](#), at least [70 accused order clerics](#) – including some who have gone to prison for child sexual abuse – are missing from the cardinal's list.

With only 159 names, O'Malley's long-awaited list was far shorter than expected. In a secret report by the archdiocese's abuse delegate in 2000 – two years before the crisis broke in Boston – the archdiocese cited a total of **191** accused priests. In his 2003 report, Massachusetts Attorney General Reilly stated that **237** Boston priests had been accused.

- See the [Annual Delegate's Report, FY2000](#), page 2.
- See the [Reilly Report](#), PDF page 19.

2. Cardinal O'Malley has "cleared" a high percentage of accused priests – four times the national average.

According to a largely overlooked archdiocesan report released in April 2006, Cardinal O'Malley's Review Board "cleared" 45% of priests (32 of 71) investigated for child sexual abuse from July 2003 through December 2005. In these 32 cases, the Board "did not find probable cause that sexual abuse of a minor had occurred." **The names of most of these cleared priests still are not known.**

- See the [Children First Final Report](#), original page 13, PDF page 25.

Cardinal O'Malley's 45% clearance rate of accused priests is much higher than the national average. Catholic Church **officials nationwide in 2005 deemed only 10% of allegations false or unsubstantiated.**

- See the [2005 Report on the Implementation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People](#), original page 32, PDF page 31

3. Under O'Malley, the Boston archdiocese has a double standard for employees accused of sexual misconduct. Accused priests may remain in place; accused laypeople are suspended immediately.

The Archdiocese's published policy indicates that the removal of a priest who is under investigation is not mandatory: "For the period of the preliminary investigation, the Archbishop may request that an accused cleric voluntarily refrain from the public exercise of sacred ministry ..." However, if the accused is a lay employee, the Archdiocese's response is unambiguous and strict: "[T]he supervisor will immediately place the accused person on administrative leave."

- See [A Pocket Guide to the Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Children](#), PDF pages 7 and 8.

4. Troubling questions remain about certain accused priests cleared by O'Malley.

[Rev. Jerome Gillespie](#) was accused in 2005 of [soliciting oral sex](#) from a woman and her 12-year-old daughter. Although most charges against him were dismissed, the priest agreed to "[sufficient facts](#)" to a charge of annoying and accosting a member of the opposite sex, and a judge ordered him to be evaluated for sex offender treatment and to have no contact with minors for two years without first disclosing his case to guardians. In 2008, it was discovered that O'Malley had quietly [returned Gillespie](#) to ministry. After SNAP publicized Gillespie's reinstatement, O'Malley again withdrew the priest from ministry.

Rev. Thomas Curran was removed from ministry by Cardinal Law in 2002 after a convicted child rapist accused [Curran and Rev. Paul Shanley](#) of raping him repeatedly as a boy. In 2007, [Cardinal O'Malley announced](#) that Curran had been cleared of all charges and assigned "permanent disability" status. In 2010, [another victim](#) of Curran came forward, and the priest was placed on leave again.

[Rev. James Power](#) was accused in 1993 of sodomizing a 13-year-old boy in 1980. In 1996, the archdiocese settled with the victim for \$35,000. In 2002, Cardinal Law removed Power from ministry and a second victim came forward. The priest's personnel file, made public in 2002, included an unsigned [note](#), dated August 27, 1993, saying "100% positive other kids." In 2009, [Cardinal O'Malley announced](#) the archdiocese was "unable to substantiate" either allegation and that Power was [removed from leave](#) and assigned senior priest status.

5. As bishop of Fall River MA, O'Malley was accused by the local prosecutor of concealing offenders' names until the statute of limitations had expired.

As Bishop O'Malley was leaving the diocese of Fall River, Massachusetts, in 2002, the local prosecutor, Bristol County District Attorney Paul Walsh, took the extraordinary step of [publicly rebuking the bishop](#) for a decade-long delay in submitting to him the names of 21 accused priests. "Why didn't he release these names to us 10 years ago?" the DA said. By the time O'Malley gave DA Walsh the priests' names in 2002, the time window for prosecuting had closed for all but one of the cases.

6. Compared to other bishops, Cardinal O'Malley has not been financially generous or fair to victims of clergy abuse.

In terms of per-survivor amounts, the mass settlements O'Malley negotiated in Fall River in 1992 and in Boston in 2003 have been ungenerous – both rank in the lower 50%.

- See our [table of settlements](#).