



Report on the Independent Reconciliation Program for the Catholic Diocese of Richmond

October 2020

Overview

On February 17, 2020, the Catholic Diocese of Richmond announced the establishment of a voluntary Independent Reconciliation Program to offer assistance to and facilitate healing for individuals who, as minors, experienced sexual abuse by its clergy. Bishop Barry C. Knestout directed the formation of the Program to offer another means of support beyond the diocese's current outreach offerings, and to provide an opportunity for eligible individuals who were victims of clergy sexual abuse to receive a monetary payment in a manner that is compassionate.

Recognizing that no amount of money will ever be able to fully compensate for the injury inflicted by abusive clergy, Bishop Knestout announced the Independent Reconciliation Program as one of many means to offer individuals a tangible sign of the Church's effort to repair the injury and overcome the estrangement caused by clergy sexual abuse of minors.

The Independent Reconciliation Claims Administrator

The Diocese of Richmond secured the services of BrownGreer, PLC, a Richmond-based and nationally recognized firm specializing in claims administration. Lynn Crowder Greer, who designed and administered the Program for the Diocese of Richmond, and her firm are well-known for their reputation as an objective and fair claims administrator, and for their handling of complex and large claims resolution programs. These programs have included: the NFL Concussion Settlement Program; the BP Oil Spill Program; the One October Settlement Fund for victims of the 2017 Las Vegas shooting; and the Fire Victims Trust arising from the PG&E's bankruptcy for those suffering personal or property damages from the California wildfires.

The Independent Reconciliation Process

The Program was designed to be purely voluntary and no individual was obligated to participate. Individuals who were victims of child sexual abuse by a member of the clergy serving in the Diocese of Richmond were eligible for the Program.

Notification of the diocese's Independent Reconciliation Program was announced on the diocese's website, digital platforms, and advertised in nine major print newspapers across the state of Virginia.

As the independent Claims Administrator, Ms. Greer and her firm developed criteria for eligible individuals to submit a claim. The Claims Administrator held complete and exclusive discretion to decide who should receive payment and the amount of any offer made. One of the most important aspects of the Program and in keeping with the Catholic Diocese of Richmond's commitment to protect the privacy of victim survivors of sexual abuse was the confidentiality of the Program.

Pursuant to the Program's protocol, the Claims Administrator maintained the confidentiality of the claimants' personal identifying information, except as necessary to process and pay a claim, to report to the diocese so it may follow its Church processes, and to comply with state or federal law, including any requirements of the Office of the Attorney General of Virginia.

"It was an honor to be entrusted with the personal and painful stories of victim survivors who, as minors, suffered sexual abuse by clergy in the Richmond Diocese. Although there is no amount of money that can ever truly compensate them for what they endured, it is our hope that the Program provided claimants with affirmation and a path to continue or begin healing," explained Lynn Crowder Greer, Claims Administrator for the Independent Reconciliation Program. "The use of technology, which allowed claimants to file and pursue their claims securely online, and the diligence and responsiveness of claimants throughout the process, allowed us to review the claims and issue payments swiftly, providing a tangible and long-awaited restitution for their abuse."

The results of the program are as follows:

Total Number of Claims Initiated: 68

Total Number Ineligible: 6

Withdrawn or Never Completed: 2

Total Number of Eligible Claims Submitted: 60

Number Denied by Administrator: 9

Number of Offers Made: 51

Number of Offers Accepted: 51

Total Monetary Payments to Victim Survivors: \$6,300,000.00

Claims were found ineligible if they did not meet the eligibility requirements set forth in the Protocol. Whether claims were denied were decisions within the sole discretion of the independent Claims Administrator.

All individuals participating in the Program, even those who have accepted a monetary payment, will forever retain the right to discuss their claim and their abuse. The claims process did not involve confidentiality agreements.

By accepting a monetary payment as part of the Independent Reconciliation Program, individuals waived any future civil legal claim against the Richmond Diocese related to their sexual abuse claims.

How is the Independent Reconciliation Program Funded?

The diocese is funding the Program through the Catholic Diocese of Richmond's self-insurance program, a loan and contributions from other religious orders, where appropriate. The diocese did not use parish or school assets. No donor restricted contributions or restricted endowments, including those in the Catholic Community Foundation and the McMahan-Parater Scholarship Foundation were used to support the Program. Nor was any money given by the faithful to support the Annual Diocesan Appeal or the Living Our Mission campaign used to fund the Program.

Conclusion

The Independent Reconciliation Program is the fulfillment of a commitment Bishop Knestout made in 2018 to help repair the damage caused by clergy sexual abuse of minors. An integral part of that commitment was the offer of financial compensation determined by an entity independent of the Diocese of Richmond.

The Diocese of Richmond is grateful to Ms. Greer and her firm for leading the claims process in the midst of the pandemic, but more importantly in providing dignity and compassion for those who submitted claims.

While the Program has concluded, the diocese's outreach to victims of clergy sexual abuse continues. The reconciliation process and the healing that accompanies it are always present.

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