

## CRIME

# 'The list has triggered emotions': Victims' attorney digs deeper into priests accused of abuse

**Kiernan Dunlop** Standard-Times

Published 5:11 a.m. ET Jan. 14, 2021 | Updated 7:22 a.m. ET Jan. 14, 2021

FALL RIVER — The sheer number of names on the Diocese of Fall River's list of clergy credibly or publicly accused of sexual abuse of a minor is shocking on its own, but the list provided little information about when and where the abuse occurred, how many victims there were, and who knew about it.

Additionally although the lists contain 75 names, an attorney for victims of sexual abuse believes it is incomplete.

“I think it's incumbent on the Diocese of Fall River to practice complete accountability and transparency and list church employees such as custodians, lectors, and deacons in addition to religious priests, seminarians, and diocesan priests [in its credibly accused list],” Mitchell Garabedian said.

Garabedian released his own list of credibly accused clergy in January of last year to pressure the diocese to release its list, which it had originally said would be released in spring of 2019, and the attorney's list included a custodian.

**More:** Victims' lawyer releases his own list of credibly accused Fall River Diocese clergy

**More:** After two-year review, Fall River Diocese releases list of clergy credibly accused of abuse

Edward Lopes, a custodian at Santo Christo Parish in Fall River, repeatedly abused his male client from 1959 to 1961 when he was 9 to 11 years old, according to Garabedian who settled a case against Lopes.

The nine clergy included in Garabedian's list are all on the diocese's list and Garabedian said he's represented 29 of their victims.

The time span of the abuse was from 1949 to 1986 and the victims at the time of abuse were from approximately 8 to 18 years old, according to Garabedian.

“All claims involved sexual abuse beginning when the victims were minors and unfortunately some were sexually abuse for years,” Garabedian said.

New victims have contacted Garabedian since the diocese released the list. Additionally, according to Garabedian, a man who called him six years ago but ultimately decided he didn't want to proceed with allegations against a priest because it was emotionally too much for him at the time, called him on Monday saying he now wants to proceed.

The victim alleges that he was sexually abused in between 1972 and 1973 by Richard E. Degagne before Degagne was a priest and was a camp counselor at Cathedral Camp in Freetown, a camp run by the diocese.

Degagne is on the diocese's list of cases that are still in process and includes living priests of the Diocese of Fall River who have been publicly accused of sexually abusing a minor, but the canonical and/or civil proceedings involving these priests have not yet been resolved, according to the diocese's website.

“The list has triggered emotions in many sexual abuse victims,” Garabedian said. “One victim called me to say that the publication of the list, although painful to review, has helped them to try to heal. But he's outraged at the number of pedophile priests listed which indicates the extent of the coverup.”

While many of the clergy on the diocese's list are widely known, such as the Rev. James Porter, who was sentenced to 18 to 20 years in prison in 1993 for sexually assaulting 28 children across southeastern Massachusetts and publicly admitted to assaulting up to 100, there are clergy that are being made public for the first time.

According to the diocese, around 25 percent of the names it published have not been made public.

Garabedian said it's not surprising to him that there are new names on the list, noting that if history has taught us anything, it's that the “Catholic Church is part of a scheme of cover-up.”

One name that doesn't appear to be listed in previous media coverage of clergy sexual abuse is William F. Baker whose first parish assignment was at St. Patrick Church of Falmouth in May 1977, according to an edition of the diocesan newspaper The Advocate.

While allegations against Baker didn't make the news, they were serious enough for him to have his faculties removed and be laicized in 2015.

When a priest is laicized it means they are dismissed from the clerical state by the Pope, according to the diocese's website.

Garabedian said the laicization process can go on for five to 10 years and called it inherently biased since it falls within the Catholic Church.

According to the diocese's list, after Baker, 72, was ordained in 1977 he also served at churches in Attleboro, Westport, Seekonk, and Fall River.

A "Seminarist Bill Baker" is listed as part of a team that worked on an ECHO ("Encountering Christ in Others") retreat that took place on Cape Cod in April 1976 and a "Deacon Bill Baker" is listed on a retreat team in November 1976, according to ECHO of Cape Cod's website.

A "Fr. Bill Baker" is listed as part of a retreat team one month in 1977 — the year William F. Baker was ordained, two months in 1978, five months in 1979, two months in 1987, and two months in 1988, according to the website.

The retreats are described as "a weekend young people can use to experience the goodness of the Lord within themselves and within others," according to the website, and the weekends are open to all high school sophomores, juniors and seniors, with college freshmen and sophomores also allowed to participate.

Some familiar names were part of the same retreat teams as "Bill Baker."

In 1977 and 1978, "Fr. Bill Baker" was on the same retreat teams as a "Fr. Jim Nickel."

James R. Nickel was on both the diocese's list of credibly accused clergy of sexual abuse of a minor and Garabedian's.

The Cape Cod Times reported in 2017 that eight of Nickel's alleged victims, whom Garabedian represented, reached an \$880,000 settlement with the Congregation of Sacred Hearts religious order and the Diocese of Fall River. The abuse occurred between 1972 and 1982 while the boys were between 10 and 20 years old. In addition to working on the Cape, Nickel is also listed as having been assigned to St. Mary Church in Fairhaven.

In January 1987, "Fr. Bill Baker" was on the same retreat team as a "Fr. Bruce Neylon."

Bruce M. Neylon is on the diocese's list and in 2019 was removed from active ministry while he was pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Fall River due to a "credible allegation of

misconduct.”

### **More:** Diocese removes Fall River priest accused of sexual misconduct

At the time the diocese said it received a report from an individual claiming that Neylon had sexual contact with him on numerous occasions in the early 1980s when the victim was 14 to 15 years old. Neylon denied the allegation.

Baker isn't the only priest on the credibly accused clergy list that Neylon appears to have ties with.

In Aug. 2000, The Sun Chronicle in Attleboro wrote an article about Neylon and the Rev. William **Boffa's** friendship, that began in their college years, and the celebration of their 25th anniversary as priests.

The two men attended seminary together and were both ordained in St. Mary's Cathedral of Fall River in 1975.

As in the case with Baker, media doesn't seem to have previously linked **Boffa** to allegations of sexual abuse of minors, but he was on the diocese's list.

According to The Sun Chronicle article, Neylon and **Boffa** met for lunch once a week and several of the priests in the Diocese got together regularly, spending days off and vacations together.

**Boffa** served as a high school chaplain, Catholic Youth Organization director, and camp and retreat house administrator, according to The Sun Chronicle.

In a 1984 edition of the Anchor, Father William **Boffa** is listed as a camp director for Catholic Boy's Day Camp and Nazareth Day Camp in Westport, which was open to boys age 5 to 14 years old.

In a separate 2001 article, The Sun Chronicle reported that the "beloved pastor" had taken a leave of absence to deal with issues related to stress and depression.

John Kearns, a spokesperson for the diocese at the time and currently, said the leave was granted by then-Bishop Sean O'Malley based on **Boffa's** request, there was no set time period for leave, and **Boffa** asked that his whereabouts not be announced.

The diocese's list states that **Boffa** had his faculties removed, but doesn't list the year, and that he's been assigned to churches in Fall River, Westport, North Easton, Taunton, Seekonk, East Freetown, and South Yarmouth.

In a press release announcing the release of its list of credibly accused clergy the diocese stated that most of the abuse occurred between the 1960s and 1980s, but there is a priest on the list who was born in 1974 and ordained in 2000.

Andrew Kozanko, 46, also doesn't appear in any past media coverage of clergy sexual abuse.

According to a 2000 edition of *The Anchor*, Kozanko, named as Andrzej Kozanko, was born and raised in Poland and during the summers of his seminary years worked as a camp counselor at Cathedral Camp in Freetown, which serves children from across the diocese.

Kozanko had his faculties restricted, but the diocese's list doesn't say when, and his assignment history includes churches in East Sandwich, New Bedford, Fall River, and Hyannis.

Garabedian said that in his experience it often takes victims until well into their 40s to come forward because they have not been able to cope with the abuse.

Victims who were sexually abused in the 90s and 00s are just starting to come forward, according to Garabedian.

So although the diocese says most of the abuse on the list occurred between the 1960s and 1980s, Garabedian said in the next 20 years he expects many more victims will come forward to report abuse that occurred in the 1990s and 2000s.

"Just because victims are too young to come forward doesn't mean matters have been taken care of," Garabedian said. "I see this in my work. I'm just starting to receive reports from victims who were abused in the '90s."

Garabedian, Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, and victim advocate and former priest Robert Hoatson are pushing the diocese to release when supervisors were first made aware of the allegations against each priest and what steps were taken in response.

"In order to fix what is broken one needs to have all the pieces first, and a clear look at how Diocesan leaders handled each allegation is an important piece," SNAP wrote in a press release.

Hoatson held a one-man protest outside of the diocese headquarters in Fall River on Wednesday calling for secret archives regarding the abuse to be released and questioning why the diocese took so long to perform the investigation that led to the release of the list.

The former priest, who said he was fired by the Archdiocese of Newark three days after testifying before New York State Legislature calling for the resignation of any bishop involved in the cover-up of sexual abuse in 2003, also questioned Edgar da Cunha acting as the bishop of the Fall River Diocese.

Hoatson worked in the Archdiocese of Newark at the same time as da Cunha and claims he did nothing when a woman reported to him that her twin sons were abused by a member of a religious order.

An article printed by The Jersey Journal corroborates Hoatson's story, reporting that a 61-year old Weehawken woman said she spoke to da Cunha in 2009 about allegations that her sons had been abused by two members of the Vocationist Fathers religious order and he did nothing.

A spokesperson from the Archdiocese said the matter was referred to authorities, but the woman claims it was only after she and Hoatson reached out to the Archdiocese's victim assistance coordinator.

Hoatson said he "couldn't believe" da Cunha was made a bishop in Fall River "after what he did."

In a letter announcing the release of the list, da Cunha wrote, "To all survivors of child sexual abuse, I am deeply sorry. We as a Church failed when you were most vulnerable. I firmly resolve to do all we can to help you heal, make certain we are accountable, and protect our children so that no other child suffers as you have."

The diocese hasn't responded directly to the requests from victim advocates to release more information, the diocese said in a statement Wednesday, "While we are not commenting on the particulars of any given case, we have and will continue to cooperate with law enforcement and civil authorities, in accordance with Massachusetts law. This includes complying with mandatory reporting obligations and providing other information and documentation to law enforcement as required."

The diocese said its list of credibly accused clergy will be updated should new information become available and if the publication results in other survivors coming forward.

For any survivors who are looking to speak with someone, the diocese's urges them to contact the Diocese's Victim Assistance Coordinator, Carolyn Shipp at 508-985-6508 or [cshipp@dioc-fr.org](mailto:cshipp@dioc-fr.org).