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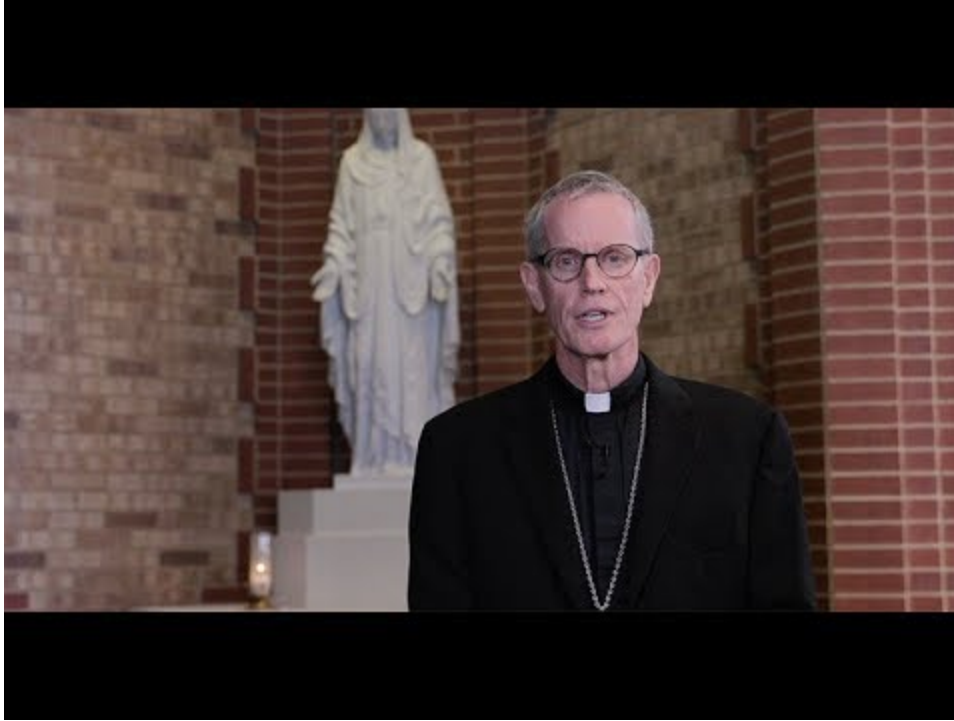
'You trusted us, and we failed': OKC archbishop apologizes in letter as report lists accused priests

Carla Hinton and Ben Felder
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Eleven current or former Oklahoma priests have been named to a list of Roman Catholic leaders credibly accused of sexually abusing minors in a report released Thursday by a metro law firm hired by the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City.

The 77-page report comes a day after the Tulsa archdiocese released a report identifying 11 other priests who had been credibly accused in its jurisdiction. The report also comes about a year after the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City promised to release its list of credibly accused priests in an effort to be transparent after a national sex abuse scandal reignited in 2018.

Adam Brooks, spokesman for McAfee & Taft, said a copy of the report was turned over to the Oklahoma attorney general's office.

"It's up to law enforcement to determine any next steps," Brooks said.

In a letter made public Thursday, Archbishop Paul S. Coakley addressed the archdiocese, expressing "profound sorrow and most sincere apologies" to anyone who has ever been sexually abused by anyone representing the Church.

"My heart breaks to have to write this letter," Coakley wrote.

"The long and the short of it is you trusted us, and we failed. Though we have made significant progress on many fronts since the 2002 publication of the U.S. bishops' 'Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People,' we must do better."

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Individuals listed in the new report include nine priests and two men who were formally dismissed from the clergy. Six of the men are deceased and one is currently in prison. Two have been formally dismissed from the clergy. The disgraced priests are identified as:

- The Rev. Thomas Behnke, O.C.D, died in 2008.
- The Rev. David Armstead Cowden, died in 2015.
- The Rev. Stephen Cude, removed from active ministry in 1998.
- The Rev. Mathias Faue, died in 1988.
- David B. Imming, formally dismissed from the clergy in 2011.
- The Rev. Francis Albert Mantica, died in 1997.
- The Rev. James Mickus, previously suspended; removed from ministry on Thursday in Chandler and Stroud, according to the archdiocese.
- The Rev. Rocco

Perone, died in 1992. • The Rev. Edward Prather, died in 1996. • James Francis Rapp, currently incarcerated for sexual abuse crime. • Benjamin Zoeller, formally dismissed from the clergy in 2011.

According to a news release from McAfee & Taft, the men were included on the list because they faced substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of minors between 1960 and 2018. The McAfee & Taft report heavily criticized the archdiocese on how complaints against priests had been handled in the past and includes recommendations on moving forward.

The firm said there were "systematic deletions of emails and other records that could have related to allegations of sexual abuse of minors."

The report states the diocese had an improper records system that limited the ability to research abuse claims.

"We encountered numerous challenges with the Archdiocese's record keeping and conclude that it lacks adequate controls over its own records," the report states.

The report said Msgr. Edward Weisenburger, who assisted in evaluating many of the allegations of sexual abuse at the times they were reported, had his emails deleted when he left in 2012 to become the bishop of Salina, Kansas.

The report also said that former Chancellor Loutitia Eason, who is now deceased, deleted nearly all of her own emails when she retired in 2017.

“As chancellor and as a licensed attorney, Mrs. Eason was also heavily involved in any allegation of sexual abuse of a minor,” the report states. “After 15 years of service to the archdiocese, we would have expected to find numerous emails affiliated with Mrs. Eason’s email account, but Mr. (Kevin) Atkins (the archdiocese’s information technology officer) confirmed in interviews with us that Mrs. Eason left behind an electronic file with only a small amount of data on it, indicating that she had deleted nearly all of her email before leaving.”

McAfee & Taft said it believed the archdiocese has been retaining all emails and documents of both active and former Archdiocese employees since 2018.

The law firm also said an organization like the archdiocese should have a “centralized record keeping system with intake protocols and the ability to track the location or status of records. We would also expect current and past copies of policies and procedures to be maintained in a centralized filing system where they could be readily accessed. Instead, we found a disorganized and scattered system, with relevant records in several different locations and formats.”

The report said the archdiocese recently acquired a case management system for allegations of sexual abuse of minors.

Thursday, Melanie Sakoda with the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), said she was troubled by the archdiocese’s reported sloppy record keeping.

"First, it's very disturbing to learn that so many records are missing," she said. "It's hard to believe that a diocese was so careless, when the

Catholic Church is known for its record keeping. I think this shows that there is a need for an independent law enforcement investigation by the Oklahoma Attorney General with a hotline for victims to report.

"Perhaps survivors and their families can help supply some of the missing information."

Firm makes recommendations

In his letter, Coakley acknowledged the ripple effect from the ongoing sex abuse scandal.

"I recognize the damage that has been done to the faithful whose trust and faith have been shaken by the sins of their leaders," he wrote. "In response to the deterioration of trust that clergy sexual abuse represents, a new level of transparency and accountability is required to demonstrate the seriousness of our commitment to creating and maintaining safe environments and addressing the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults by clergy."

Along those lines, McAfee & Taft shared its recommendations for the archdiocese. The law firm said some have already been implemented:

Engage a qualified independent investigator to review allegations of sexual abuse of minors and report to the Archdiocesan Review Board.

Take steps to improve record keeping regarding allegations of abuse.

Implement a written records retention policy and acquire a more robust record keeping system.

Publicly report the findings and actions of the archdiocese when it makes decisions relating to allegations of sexual abuse of minors.

Clarify that all archdiocesan personnel should immediately report any concerns about the sexual abuse of minors.

In the law firm's news release, Ronald T. Shinn Jr., the attorney who led the firm's investigation, said the archdiocese did not have to order an independent investigation of its files but chose to on its own accord.

"The Archdiocese wanted a thorough, independent investigation; McAfee & Taft provided precisely that," Shinn Jr. said. "It should be noted the archdiocese was under no obligation to initiate this outside investigation, and that by doing so, it subjected itself to independent review and criticism of its past actions. While this investigation and our report address difficult and painful issues, we hope the public will commend the archdiocese's transparency and accountability."

To learn more

To read McAfee & Taft's report, go to <https://archokcreport.com>. To read Coakley's letter, go to archokc.org/clergyabusereport.

Reporting abuse

Under Oklahoma law, all individuals must report incidents or suspicions of sexual abuse of a minor (person under age 18) to law enforcement authorities. The Archdiocese of Oklahoma City said victims of abuse, past or present, also can report abuse to church officials by contacting the Archdiocesan Pastoral Response Hotline at

405-720-9878. The Oklahoma Department of Human Services has established a statewide abuse reporting hotline at 800-522-3511.