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St. John the Baptist Church was led by a revered priest, Charles Klauder, who has been put on a list of abusers. More information should be supplied by diocese.

Reveal the facts

Shocking revelations underline need for transparency by Buffalo Diocese

New revelations of abuse continue. And, apparently, so do the attempts to keep them quiet. The Buffalo Diocese' longstanding refusal to admit transparency into its process of addressing decades of sexual abuse by local clergy becomes more indefensible as the months and years go by.

Now we are finding out, as reported by The News' Jay Tokasz, that Monsignor Charles A. Klauder, a priest who claimed to "walk in the footsteps" of a saint, is also numbered among those who sexually abused children.

Klauder was pastor for 45 years at St. John the Baptist in Tonawanda, a church led in the 19th century by John Neumann, who was canonized in 1977.

Klauder died in 1972, but his name was not added to the list of abusers maintained by the diocese until 2019. There was no announcement and no details that might shed light on what he did or who else knew about his actions.

There's no way of knowing if the diocese officials of his time shielded Klauder from exposure or any disciplinary action, as such officials have done with other priests who were allowed to remain in positions of trust for far too long.

"Trust" is a word that becomes increasingly difficult to associate with the Buffalo Diocese. How can there be trust without transparency? Requests for files from the diocese are accompanied by legal battles, as the organization spends tens of thousands of dollars to keep back information on the abuse and how secrecy was maintained for as long as it was.

To continue this tightlipped approach only confirms suspicions that deceptions and coverups are the types of behaviors parishioners can expect from the diocese in all situations. This seems particularly tragic when considering the lengths to which many parishioners are willing to go to save their beloved churches, many of which have been put on a list for closure.

Even after New York State Attorney General's office determined that the diocese should release records the AG had subpoenaed in its 2020-22 in-

vestigation to the Buffalo News, the diocese recently went to court to block their release.

The diocese contends that the privacy of victims as well as its ongoing Chapter 11 bankruptcy negotiations prevent it from providing information that might help explain how the Church kept under wraps allegations of sexual abuse against more than 200 priests, in some cases for decades.

The privacy issue is moot, as names have already been redacted and wouldn't be revealed without consent in any case. As for the bankruptcy issue, the 900 people who stand to benefit from a mediated settlement deserve that the diocese stop spending its money to keep back information that — had it been revealed decades ago — may have saved many of these victims from having their lives marred by unconscionable acts.

In at least one case, that of Rev. Donald Becker, records in the attorney general's report show that as early as 1983, diocese officials knew that Becker likely molested boys. Yet, despite multiple additional complaints of abuse, he was allowed to remain in parishes until 2002, when he was suddenly allowed to take medical leave.

The diocese's reluctance to reveal information hasn't helped anyone — certainly not the reputation of the Catholic Church in Western New York. In fact, by persisting in holding back information, the diocese doubles down on the behavior that has already alienated so many of the faithful.

A 2021 Buffalo News analysis of Child Victims Act lawsuits filed from 2019 to 2021 found 230 Catholic priests had been accused of molesting children in the Buffalo Diocese, with the allegations dating as far back as 1946.

And now one more name, that of a revered pastor credited with rebuilding a parish formerly led by someone now a saint, is found to be on an infamous list.

The shocking news about Klauder is another reason, as if any were needed, that the diocese must stop trying to withhold any information on sexual abuse by its priests and let the entire story be publicly told.

Anything else delays justice for victims and deepens distrust of an institution still beloved by many.