



May 4, 2012

Dear friends in Christ,

In the aftermath of the February 2011 grand jury report, 26 of our priests were publicly placed on administrative leave. In each case, the cause was an allegation somewhere in the man's past relating to sexual abuse of a minor or inappropriate contact with a minor. The past year has been difficult for the whole Catholic community: for the victims of abuse who had to tell their stories yet again; for people in our parishes; for the good priests who serve our local Church; and for the men on administrative leave.

As bishop, I have a duty to understand the suffering and support the healing of victims of clergy sexual abuse. I also have the duty to respect and support my brother priests. Finally, I have a duty to love and serve our people and to ensure their safety in our parishes, especially the young. These duties should not conflict. But if and when they do, as long as I serve as your bishop, the Church will place the healing of victims and the safety of our people first.

Today I am announcing the resolution of eight of the cases of priests on administrative leave. Three of the priests have been found suitable for ministry. Five others will not return to ministry, although they retain the right to appeal this decision to the Holy See. In the case of a ninth priest, the man is now deceased, and no investigation can be concluded. All of these cases can be found on our archdiocesan website. The remaining cases cannot yet be announced. People have a right to understand why.

Given the gravity of sexual abuse and its impact on victims and the wider public, the Archdiocese committed itself last year to an exhaustive review of the 26 cases in question. The process is complex and time-consuming. It cannot be hurried or abbreviated without violating its purpose. We referred all of our cases to the local district attorney and waited for clearance from his or her office before conducting our own internal investigations. Six of the original 26 cases are still under law enforcement review, and we cannot complete our process until that work is done. Two other cases were recently released to us after law enforcement review. They are now being reviewed internally. In all of the remaining cases, we've received clearance from law enforcement, our internal investigations are complete, and the cases are awaiting either examination by the Archdiocesan Review Board or a final decision by me.

In making today's decisions I have relied heavily on the findings of a multi-disciplinary team of medical, law enforcement, and other experts led by veteran child abuse prosecutor Gina Maisto Smith, and the guidance of our Archdiocesan Review Board, which has been expanded and strengthened over the past year. These experts have given me vital professional counsel on the suitability of each man for ministry, based on their decades of experience.

Last December I shared with you that our local Church faces many challenges over the next 18 months. These problems have developed over many years. None has caused more human damage than the sexual abuse of minors by clergy who betrayed their own priestly vocation. This is a tragedy – a bitter source of suffering for victims and their families that I deeply regret. It demands from me and from every bishop and priest a rededication to purity and integrity in the way we conduct our ministries. It demands from the Archdiocese and each of our parishes a recommitment to helping victims heal and to protecting our people as they seek to encounter God.

Over the years, as part of my ministry as bishop, I have met personally with dozens of abuse victims. The experience has taught me that no words can sufficiently describe the hurt a victim feels. Today I apologize fully and sincerely on behalf of the Archdiocese to all victims of clergy sexual abuse. Sinful actions in the past cannot be changed. But the future will be shaped by our actions from this point forward. Amid all the confusion and suffering of the past year, certain lessons have been learned. Above all, I believe that a spirit of integrity animates the persons who now work for the Archdiocese to ensure the safety of our people, to assist victims of sexual abuse, and to prevent sexual misconduct in our church environments in the future.

Ms. Leslie Davila, who heads our victim assistance efforts, comes to us with more than 15 years of experience working with victims of crime, including victims of sexual assault. Mr. Albert Toczydowski, our delegate for investigations, works closely with law enforcement and is a former Deputy District Attorney. Ms. Mary Achilles, one of Pennsylvania's most respected victims' advocates, has led an extensive training program in identifying and reporting child abuse for more than 20,000 of our archdiocesan priests, staff and volunteers. Ms. Achilles is also the architect of "Honesty, Healing and Hope in Christ," a support initiative for those parishes directly impacted by allegations of abuse that begins now.

All of these strong professionals are people of experience, skill and character. All have joined the work of the Archdiocese over the past year, and each has done outstanding work in renewing -- from the ground up -- our commitment to help victims and protect our families. Despite our failures, God has blessed this Archdiocese with great talent and resources. In beginning to resolve these cases of priests placed on administrative leave last year, we need to acknowledge that much work still needs to be done in restoring the health of our local Church. But the work has nonetheless begun. In the Easter season we wait for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It's the Holy Spirit who gives us the confidence, strength and hope we need for the future. Please pray that the Holy Spirit will ignite in all of us the fire of His love to renew His Church.

Your brother in the Risen Lord,

Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.

Archbishop of Philadelphia