



# ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

October 23, 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We must face the past and learn from it, and we must know if our children are safe today. Thanks to our ongoing vigilance, they are.

A year ago, I made a promise that the Archdiocese of Denver would not hide from the past and must face the historical sexual abuse of minors by its diocesan priests. In February I wrote to you, advising you that we were working with the Attorney General's office to invite an independent third-party investigator, former U.S. Attorney Robert Troyer, to conduct an independent review of all three dioceses in Colorado. The scope of that work is documented in a written agreement, which is published on our website and the Attorney General's website, and anyone who reads that document will understand it was a sweeping investigation.

I want to thank Attorney General Phil Weiser, and Mr. Troyer for their efforts to work with us to protect children. This was not an easy task for anyone involved.

## THE REPORT

Mr. Troyer's review is now complete, and his written report covers 70 years of files and allegations of sexual abuse of minors dating back to 1950. Mr. Troyer interviewed survivors, priests, experts, victim advocates, safe environment staff, and others as part of his investigation and fact-finding efforts. He met with experts in the field of child abuse prevention. In addition, the Attorney General's office set up a phone line and encouraged survivors to come forward. New survivors came forward. We should all be comforted that this investigation spanned seven decades, has been thorough and is transparent.

I promised without reservation that I would openly share his report and adopt his recommendations. **I honor that promise today.**

## THE SURVIVORS

I want to start by addressing the courage of the survivors who have shared the stories of their abuse. As a result of the Attorney General and Church's shared efforts to have this issue

investigated and a report published, several survivors have come forward for the first time and more are likely to come forward in the days ahead. We recognize how difficult it is for survivors of abuse to share their stories, and we thank all of you for your courage.

If any survivor wishes to meet with me personally, my door is open. I have met with many survivors, and from these heart wrenching personal interactions, I know there are no words that I can say that will take away the pain. However, I want to be clear that on behalf of myself and the Church, I apologize for the pain and hurt that this abuse has caused, and for anytime the Church's leaders failed to prevent it from happening. I am sorry about this horrible history—but it is my promise to continue doing everything I can so it never happens again. My sincere hope is that this report provides some small measure of justice and healing.

As we all read about the abuse of the past, it is easy to become angry at the abusers and those who protected them, and deeply saddened at the damage these perpetrators inflicted on children. Indeed, two priests, Robert White and Leonard Abercrombie, account for over 60% of all the victims in the report. These two men devastated dozens of victims and their families. Fourteen years ago, in 2006, the Archdiocese of Denver established a program for victims of priests to come forward, and more than 50 victims came forward and received financial compensation. More have come forward since then. I commit to you through the independent compensation program jointly opened two weeks ago—by all three dioceses in Colorado—that we are here to help you if you were abused by one of these two priests or any other diocesan priest.

## VIGILANCE

One of the important goals of this independent review was to determine whether our children are safe—whether there are diocesan priests in ministry with substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of a minor. From his review, Mr. Troyer identified **no diocesan priests in active ministry in the Archdiocese with substantiated claims of sexual abuse of a minor. His report also found no substantiated reports of sexual abuse of minors by diocesan priests in the Archdiocese within the past 20 years.** Consistent with every study of the sexual abuse scandal in the Church—over 85% of the reported cases examined by Mr. Troyer are from the 1970's or earlier. The last substantiated incident of abuse across all three dioceses was 1998 (and that priest is in prison and the case was handled properly by the Archdiocese). The horror of this abuse is something we must learn from, and for me it culminates in a single word:

## VIGILANCE.

Before I turn to the need for vigilance, please, I urge you, for the innocent priests who serve you and this community every day and who have suffered this scandal, for the parents in our schools, for all of those in our parishes and programs, for our volunteers and for every good-

intentioned person in Colorado, maintain focus on the fact that review identifies no substantiated allegations of abuse in the last 20 years and found no diocesan priest in active ministry with a substantiated claim of abuse. We are truly blessed with the priests in our Archdiocese! As I have read the report and revisit the historical abuse from decades ago, I have kept this progress in the front of my mind.

Now we must learn from the suffering of the victims and never assume that we could not face another perpetrator in our midst. Just in the last few years it has become even more apparent that perpetrators infect every organization, the Boy Scouts, the public schools, the Olympics, news organizations, colleges—these abusers can manifest in every part of our lives if we are not alert and responsive. We, more than any organization in this Country, know we must be vigilant.

## **PREVENTION**

The Archdiocese believes strongly in the prevention and reporting policies we've implemented and strengthened since 1991, but we welcomed an independent review to identify any weaknesses or gaps that could be addressed. Since the Dallas Charter of 2002, we have trained 84,000 priests, deacons, employees and volunteers on how to identify signs of abuse or neglect and on their obligations as mandatory reporters. Every year, approximately 22,000 children are trained how to identify inappropriate conduct by adults and how they can report it. We require all priests to sign a sexual misconduct policy and attend training. It is efforts like these that make me grateful to our Office of Child and Youth Protection and the more than one hundred thousand lay Catholics that make our environments safe.

Importantly, Mr. Troyer found our safe environment training programs to be effective. But, given his experience and work on this project, he recommended that our investigation of reported abuse should be done by independent trained investigators and the process needs to be more victim-centered. We are committed to continuing to improve our response to anyone who comes forward to report sexual abuse as a minor, and specifically those that come forward when they are adults and their abusers were removed from ministry or died a long time ago. We know we have been able to help many people, but we will listen and learn from those who came forward and felt they weren't treated appropriately. Indeed, we will follow all of Mr. Troyer's recommendations and are already working to implement changes. I plan to personally be involved in that effort and will be in continued contact with Mr. Troyer and the Attorney General to make sure our collaboration to protect children is ongoing.

## REASSERTING THE PROMISE

To close, I will remind you that a year ago, as your Archbishop, I made a series of public promises to ensure the sins of the past are not repeated. Today I stand by those promises and reassert my commitment to them further:

- Allegations of sexual abuse of a minor will continue to always be properly reported to local authorities.
- I will continue to immediately remove a member of the clergy or any other church worker from active ministry during an investigation into an allegation of sexual misconduct with a minor.
- I will continue to take very seriously all reported incidents of misconduct by members of the clergy or other Church workers, and we will investigate even non-criminal misconduct with great diligence.
- I will continue to never transfer a member of the clergy who is under investigation.
- I will continue to remove from ministry permanently and without the ability to be transferred to any other Catholic institution, any member of the clergy who is found to have had sexual misconduct with a minor.
- I will continue to hold us accountable for addressing misconduct whenever we are made aware of it.
- I demand and will continue to enforce a strict and diligent screening process for all seminary applicants.

Sexual abuse is a societal problem and there is no single answer or single action to eliminate all sexual abuse, but we will not rest in our efforts to protect children. We will use our resources and community partnerships to be a leader in this area, and we will strive to improve. For a full list of my promises to you, and for additional information about the report, please visit [archden.org/promise](http://archden.org/promise).

Please join me in praying for all survivors, their families, and our communities, and for our ongoing efforts to bring healing and reconciliation to the survivors of sexual abuse.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Samuel J. Aquila". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.

Archbishop of Denver