

https://www.newjerseyhills.com/florham_park_eagle/opinion/editorial/editorial-protect-children-in-the-catholic-church/article_c6864681-9737-51d4-9435-c545f892a195.html

EDITORIAL: Protect children in the Catholic church

Feb 20, 2019

The Roman Catholic Church is reckoning with allegations of sexual abuse.

Last summer, a special grand jury report in Pennsylvania found more than 1,000 people were sexually abused by Catholic priests in that state over a 70-year period. The report also alleged a cover-up by church leaders.

On the heels of the Pennsylvania report, N.J. State Attorney General Gurbir Grewal convened a task force to look into allegations of sexual abuse by members of the clergy in the various Catholic dioceses of New Jersey. The task force also is directed to investigate whether any diocese has covered up abuse reports. As the investigation continues into allegations of sexual abuse in Catholic churches in New Jersey, the public learned the names of individuals credibly accused of sexually abusing minors.

The state's five Catholic dioceses released the names on Feb. 13. Among the 28 individuals on the list released by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Paterson was James A.D. Smith, once assigned to Holy Family Parish at 1 Lloyd Ave. We understand for some, seeing the names

released was surprising, even upsetting. For others, it comes as a relief, knowing the diocese has acknowledged what has been known in communities and by victims.

The Rev. Smith, ordained 1956, had multiple accusations leveled against him. He died in January 2015.

In 2005, he was found guilty by the diocese of at least one act of sexually abusing a minor, resulting in his permanent suspension as a priest.

In addition to Holy Family, Smith also was assigned to nearby St. Patrick Parish in Chatham and St. Rose of Lima Parish in East Hanover.

The list includes only the names of priests and deacons who worked within the Diocese. Left out are laypersons, priests, monks, nuns or others who served in religious orders or at Diocese-run Catholic schools. The list released by the Diocese of Paterson includes names, accusations and assignments, but does not list the years the accused clergy served locally. While some have argued that the lists released on Feb. 13 don't go far enough in addressing the scale of the abuse allegations, we believe releasing the names of those credibly accused is a good first step in acknowledging sexual abuse of minors by those in ministry. For decades, the Catholic church has been plagued with allegations of priests sexually abusing children. What's more shocking than details of the incidents are attempts by church leaders to cover them up.

In a letter on the Diocese website, Bishop Arthur Serratelli apologized for the abuse, stating that "one case of a child being abused is one too many."

We understand that some of the accused priests and deacons have passed away and the alleged incidents are well beyond the statute of limitations to be prosecuted. But we believe that releasing the names of credibly accused priests and deacons gives some victims a sense of closure.

Now it is time to move on. And to take action.

Bishop Serratelli wrote in the same letter that misconduct by “those ordained as ministers of our faith” will not be tolerated. Going forward, we hope that the Diocese of Paterson – and all Catholic dioceses and archdioceses – will work to ensure that minors are safe when they enter a Catholic church. That they can trust those who lead worship.

Many Roman Catholic dioceses, including the Paterson diocese, have training programs for adults to recognize and identify sexual abuse. Also implemented are background screenings, assistance to survivors and contact information to report abuse.

We hope that in light of the ongoing task force investigation and the release of names of those credibly accused of sexual abuse, that these programs and procedures will be strengthened.

The church has a responsibility to protect children from abuse.

MORE INFORMATION

Former Madison, Florham Park, Chatham clergy on sex abuse list