

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC

ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA



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Archdiocese of Atlanta responds to release of abuse report

Atlanta, Georgia—The Most Rev. Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv., archbishop of Atlanta, released the following statement regarding the release of the Georgia Prosecuting Attorneys' Council (PAC) report on the review of files related to clergy abuse in the Catholic Church in Georgia. (<https://georgiabulletin.org/>)

“Let me begin by saying clearly that any abuse perpetrated by priests, religious brothers or sisters, volunteers or employees of the Catholic Church is unacceptable. It cannot and will not be tolerated. This archdiocese will not protect abusers and we will not allow them to have access to our communities.

The report released today by the Prosecuting Attorneys' Council (PAC) represents a voluntary effort to be transparent about what happened in the past in hopes of moving forward with the healing process. Drastic changes have happened within the church in the last 20 years. We have worked hard to better understand and prevent abuse from ever happening again. We will not waver from the zero-tolerance policy currently in place.

I have loved my life as a priest, pastor, educator and bishop. When I hear the stories of the deep hurt caused by other priests, volunteers or employees, I feel a deep grief and shame. If you have been hurt by the church because of abuse, whether you are a direct survivor or someone who feels betrayed by the actions from the past, I am truly sorry for your pain. Please know that I am committed to a safe and transparent Church.”

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The Archdiocese of Atlanta encompasses the northern half of Georgia covering 69 counties. The archdiocese is a vibrant, diverse and rapidly growing Catholic community. As of 2022, there were 102 parishes and missions, 293 diocesan and religious priests, 38 seminarians, 17 archdiocesan Catholic schools, 1.2 million Catholics and 7.5 million people in north central Georgia.



Summary notes with quotes from PAC report

- The Georgia Prosecuting Attorneys' Council (PAC) recognized the work the archdiocese continually does to create and maintain safe environments as well as provide care and support to victim survivors. *"The Archdiocese of Atlanta and Diocese of Savannah appear sincere in their efforts to right past wrongs by providing pastoral care to victims and complying fully and timely with Georgia's mandated reporter statute."* (255)
- The Archdiocese of Atlanta takes seriously every report of abuse and, as noted in the PAC report, cooperates with law enforcement to ensure proper investigations are conducted. *"Based on records reviewed, since 2002, the Archdiocese of Atlanta and the Diocese of Savannah have been notifying the appropriate authorities either by contacting the Department of Family and Children Services or law enforcement of child abuse allegations reported to their organizations. The Archdiocese of Atlanta and Diocese of Savannah maintain information on their websites regarding instructions on how to contact local and state authorities in order to report abuse. When staff receive an allegation of abuse, Archdiocesan policy requires that a follow up letter be sent to the local DFCS office detailing all the information provided to the intake center in order to keep records of their response to allegations of abuse. A copy of the letter is also required to be sent to the Office of Child and Youth Protection. The information includes contact information for the Georgia Department of Human Resources Division of Family and Children Services, by providing both the child abuse hotline number (1-855-GACHILD) and a link for the Department. In addition, they also provide a link to locate the appropriate District Attorney's Office."* (252)
- Ten years before the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (Charter) was issued by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Archdiocese of Atlanta was addressing the issue. *"Conversations regarding the need for a sexual abuse policy began with Archbishop Eugene Marino in the late 1980's ... The Atlanta Archdiocese has had a sexual abuse policy in place since 1990, which was revised in 1992, 1994 and revised again in 2003."* (251)
- Today, the Office of Safe Environment takes a two-fold approach, performing background checks on those who wish to work or volunteer in schools and churches, along with training both children and adults in how to spot and report abuse. During the 2021-2022 fiscal year, the Archdiocese of Atlanta trained 21,490 children in grades K-12 through an age-appropriate and faith-based program. In addition, more than 34,000 adults attended VIRTUS Protecting God's Children training. The Victims' Assistance Coordinator provides support and resources for survivors including opportunities for counseling and retreats.

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- The Archdiocese of Atlanta and the Diocese of Savannah undergo an annual third-party audit of their safe environment programs. Both dioceses have passed that audit every year.
(<https://archatl.com/offices/child-and-youth-protection/audit/>)
- The bishops of Georgia are confident that they are doing everything reasonably necessary to protect the children who come into contact with our schools, churches, parishes and ministries.
- The report confirms the accuracy of the information already available on the [Archdiocese of Atlanta website](#), first posted in November 2018 and periodically updated, indicating that of the more than 1,300 priests who have served here in the last 60 years, 13 (7 from the archdiocese and 6 from religious orders) are credibly accused of child sexual abuse. The PAC report is largely devoid of allegations since 2002-2003, when the Charter went into effect.
- An additional 17 clergy members who served in the archdiocese at some point have been credibly accused outside of Georgia. There is no evidence of any one of them having committed sexual abuse while serving in the archdiocese.
- There are a number of priests and lay employees listed in the report who faced unsubstantiated accusations of child sexual abuse. The archdiocese does not list unsubstantiated accusations on the website. According to the report itself, *“In the spirit of transparency these records were provided to the PAC for review. Therefore, in all the file reviews included in this section, the allegations have not been proven or substantiated in a court of law. Moreover, in some cases the allegations were found to be unsubstantiated or prosecution was declined. Consequently, all allegations in this section are and remain simply allegations.”* (132)
- In PAC’s own words, *“The review did not uncover ongoing or active allegations of sexual abuse that could be criminally pursued.”* (11)