

Statement from the Archdiocese of Denver

The Catholic dioceses of Colorado just voluntarily completed the most thorough and transparent independent review of historical allegations of sexual abuse of minors by any youth-serving organization in the state. The Archdiocese of Denver fully cooperated in the review, ensuring that all information was provided to the investigators. It did not leave out any relevant information and did not influence the report's analysis or conclusions. This has all been verified by the Attorney General, including in his recent public comments about this program. In addition, the contract covering the special master's work includes all agreed terms, and that document has been available on the [Attorney General's website](#) since February 2019.

As part of the process, there were multiple efforts made to encourage survivors to come forward through a safe, non-adversarial, confidential, and independent reparations program. This encouragement was amplified by the extensive media coverage of the independent reparations program. The Church's effort to urge victims to come forward and then provide reparations to survivors, no matter how long ago the abuse occurred, further assured all information from victims they wished to share was made public. This kind of request to learn about wrongs of the past has not been done by any other organization in Colorado, ever.

It is important to note that after all these calls for information and the work of law enforcement to exhaustively probe for the truth, the AG has confirmed that there are no substantiated allegations against diocesan priests in over 20 years, and no substantiated allegations have been made against diocesan priests currently serving in ministry. Again, this is not a conclusion from the Church—this has all been confirmed by the AG and the Special Master through their exhaustive review of records, interviews of victims, and repeated calls for people to come forward. Through all of this it is now established that we are looking at a historical, meaning decades old—not current—issue.

Part of the independent review included an “analysis of the quality and effectiveness of the diocese's response to the abuse allegation,” and whether the “Diocese had received any report of that priest engaging in sexual misconduct with other children prior to the abuse incident described.” Given all that we know today, the Archdiocese knew and agreed that it was important to include these sections to be transparent and accountable about when in the past, between 70 to 20 years ago, the Archdiocese had not taken critical and appropriate steps. The Archdiocese agreed to this voluntarily, including applying present day standards to past decisions, with the critical goal of making sure that the mistakes of the past will not be repeated.

While the special master reports cover a lot of ground, the biggest historic failing is when abuse occurred after there was some notice of a prior incident with a priest. The report indicates this happened with 5 of the 27 priests: Harold White, Leonard Abercrombie, John Stein, James Rasby, and Larry St. Peter. The report establishes that the most recent time this happened was 1975 when allegations against Rasby and St. Peter were not properly and fully addressed.

Allegations were made against White as early as 1960, which means had immediate action been taken, much of his abuse may have been prevented. All of the analysis we are doing today is obviously in hindsight, and under today's understanding of sexual abuse and today's standards for handling such things. Clearly the administrators working decades ago must be judged by the societal standards of their time, including what police agencies and all institutions did to address sexual abuse. Put differently this was not a trial where administrators defended themselves, which is impossible given they are all dead

and the information is decades old. Instead, it was a transparent review of the facts in the bright light of today's knowledge and standards.

To be clear, sexual abuse is abhorrent and Archbishop Aquila and the Archdiocese have stated many times that given what is known today and what has come out as more victims have come forward, there is absolutely no excuse for the failure to remove White or the other four priests from ministry. Most importantly in terms of the safety of children today, and the systems in place to identify and address any potential misconduct, it is abundantly clear from the Attorney General's and Special Master's exhaustive work that this could not happen in the Church today.

In Denver, a clear change in policy, culture and approach occurred under Archbishop James Stafford:

- A comprehensive sexual misconduct policy including abuse prevention, reporting, and response protocols was first instituted in 1991, a full decade before the U.S. Church adopted the 2002 Dallas Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.
- Responsible for the permanent removal of White, Abercrombie and St. Peter.
- Initiated an extensive overhaul of our seminaries to change the way the Archdiocese screens, evaluates and forms the future priests of the Archdiocese.

We believe Cardinal Stafford's work to address this issue and the steps he took are a primary reason for the sharp decline in substantiated allegations over the last several decades, including no known substantiated allegations against diocesan priests in over 20 years.

Archbishop Charles Chaput continued that work, including implementing the requirements of the 2002 Dallas Charter, and also instituting an independent reparations program in 2006, that was hailed by the [Denver Post](#) at the time as an "honorable way" to address the historical issue.

This critical work was again advanced by Archbishop Samuel Aquila and the other Colorado bishops' participation in the recent independent review and reparations process. The adoption of all recommendations from the Special Master will further strengthen our prevention, response, and investigation policies and protocols to ensure only the highest of standards are being used to protect children and care for survivors.