



+ July 11, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With the upcoming attorney general hearing, I feel an urgent need to address the accusations that the Archdiocese of Seattle is “not cooperating” with Attorney General Bob Ferguson regarding his subpoena, despite our efforts to be transparent and collaborative.

But first, I want to share a few facts about clergy sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Seattle:

- Yes, we had clergy sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Seattle. We have been proactively addressing it in a number of ways for more than 40 years. We take sexual abuse by Church personnel very seriously and we remain committed to preventing it, reporting it, supporting victim survivors and their families, improving transparency and finding paths towards healing.
- Yes, even priests who were acknowledged abusers and removed from ministry continued to receive some form of ongoing financial support from the Archdiocese as this is required by canon law.
- Yes, we had priests in treatment who were cleared for ministry by medical and therapeutic professionals prior to the 1980s. At this time in our country’s history, the concept of sexual abuse was not well understood by medical professionals and the Archdiocese was following their professional advice, which reflected the common practice for treating sexual abusers at the time –not just in the Catholic Church. Medical professionals today have a much more robust understanding of sexual abuse and the Archdiocese adjusted its practices and responses accordingly. Today the Archdiocese has many more policies, processes and procedures in place to prevent abuse and to respond when an allegation is made.
- Sexual abuse of a minor by clergy is very rare now – the last known incidence in our Archdiocese occurred in 2007. Locally, clergy sexual abuse peaked in 1975 and has since sharply declined due to effective prevention efforts including background checks, our Safe Environment program, seminarian formation and clergy training, to name a few.
- To learn more of the details of our response to the sexual abuse crisis, including the list of credibly accused clergy shared publicly in 2016 and updated subsequently, please visit the [Protect and Heal](#) website.

None of this is new information – even though the Attorney General is presenting it that way. **And none of this information relates to the core issues in the upcoming hearing with the Attorney General.**

While it is true that some attorneys general across the U.S. have investigated other dioceses, in the state of Washington, our attorney general does not have the same authority or jurisdiction. Our

attorney general is attempting to use the state's Charitable Trust Act to request records – even though there is a very clear religious exemption that our Legislature adopted to limit the attorney general's authority.

Because of this clear religious exemption, we simply cannot comply. Doing so puts First Amendment rights and the foundational concept of separation of church and state at risk. This does not just impact the Archdiocese of Seattle – it impacts all the Catholic dioceses in the state, all other religious institutions in the state and the protection of constitutional rights of every citizen. Despite these concerns, and because we share the same goals of preventing abuse, reporting abuse, supporting abuse survivors and their families, protecting their privacy and publicizing our actions, we have sought a way to work fairly, legally and collaboratively with the Office of the Attorney General. We have been discussing these issues with them for nearly a year. **However, we cannot move forward in a manner that attacks our First Amendment rights and has widespread ramifications for *all* religious institutions.**

In addition, the request is too broad. To provide just one example, the attorney general wants *every receipt from January 1, 1940, to the present*. It is unclear how 80-year-old receipts from all our parishes, schools and ministries will prevent future sexual abuse. This broad request would take many months to produce irrelevant documents and waste millions of dollars for us and for taxpayers. It would also distract us from our essential mission work and our focus on healing and pastoral care.

To be very clear: we are not seeking to cover up the sins of the past. We acknowledge that sexual abuse occurred; it is tragic and heartbreaking. We want abusers to be held accountable and we wish to dispel the fear that clergy sexual abuse is rampant today, because it is not. I know that this grave sin in the Church has harmed victim survivors and their families. It has also harmed innocent clergy, seminarians and all Catholics by fracturing trust in the Church, harming relationships and turning people away from their faith – away from their relationship with Jesus Christ.

I am sorry for the grave sin of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and in the Archdiocese of Seattle. I want to assure you of my ongoing commitment to make sure these crimes and sins are not repeated so that we can restore wholeness and renewed holiness to our Church.

Regardless of the outcome of the legal hearing on Friday, please know we remain committed to all those who were harmed by sexual abuse, their families, and creating a safe environment for all. Together we will work to forge new pathways for healing.

Join me in praying for the renewal of the entire people of God as we navigate this moment of reckoning with this painful reality of our history, searching for a just process of transparency and accountability.

Please pray for all those who were harmed by sexual abuse, that they may find grace and healing. And please be assured of my continued prayers for you. As always, I remain,

In The Heart of Christ,



Most Rev. Paul D. Etienne, DD, STL
Archbishop of Seattle