



Statement from the Catholic Bishops of Colorado

December 1, 2020

Background: In February of 2019, the Bishops of Colorado in cooperation with Attorneys General Cynthia Coffman and Phil Weiser announced a voluntary agreement to have the dioceses undergo a thorough and independent review of the history of sexual abuse of minors by diocesan priests in Colorado, that would also ensure no diocesan priest with a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor was still in ministry. This review was led by Special Master Robert Troyer.

As part of the process, there was also an independent and comprehensive review of the dioceses' child protection practices, to further build on the decades of work that had already been done in addressing this issue.

At the same time, an independent reparations program was also announced that would open the same month (October 2019) as the Special Master's findings from his initial review were released. The program would allow anyone who had not previously come forward before, anyone who had come forward during the initial review process, and anyone who had not previously received financial support from the dioceses, to have the opportunity to participate in an independent, safe, and non-adversarial process to receive reparations. Today, as the reparations program concludes after more than a year of work, the Independent Oversight Committee for that program issued a report summarizing the innovative approach used in the program to award financial reparations to 77 survivors, many of which came forward for the first time.

In addition, as part of the dioceses' commitment to transparency, the Special Master was commissioned again to review and investigate any new allegations made in the IRRP, and prepare a supplemental report with his findings. The Special Master's supplemental report was also released today.

Using the same criteria as the initial report, the supplemental report identified 46 additional substantiated allegations, and this included substantiated allegations against 9 previously unnamed priests. The total from the two reports is 212 substantiated incidents committed by 52 diocesan priests.

It is important to note that the findings of the supplemental report fit the same historical pattern as the initial report with the vast majority of incidents occurring decades ago. In fact, 91% of the incidents in the supplemental report are from the 1950s to 1970s, more than 40 years ago. None of the incidents are from the past 20 years.

In addition to reviewing the past, the supplemental report also focuses on the present, including a review of the steps taken by the dioceses in the last year to improve their policies and practices when it comes to handling allegations of abuse and helping survivors that come forward. The supplemental report makes clear that each diocese "has now implemented very substantial, specific, and measurable improvements to its child-protection systems," and implemented the recommendations identified in the Special Master's initial report.

The following is a statement from Archbishop Samuel Aquila (Denver), Bishop Michael Sheridan (Colorado Springs), Bishop Stephen Berg (Pueblo), and Bishop Jorge Rodriguez (Denver):

“We hope and pray that this independent review and reparations process over the last two years has provided a measure of justice and healing for the survivors who came forward and shared their stories. We remain heart-broken by the pain they have endured, we again offer our deepest apologies for the past failures of the Church, and we promise that we will always pray for continued healing for them and their families.

We as bishops continue to be willing to meet personally with survivors when they make the request. Even those these specific programs have concluded, we will continue to work with and support anyone who comes forward.

We also hope that this process has demonstrated our commitment to continuing to enhance and strengthen our child-protection policies so that the sins of the past do not repeat themselves. We are grateful for the work completed by the Special Master to thoroughly analyze our protocols and make sure they meet the highest of standards for any youth-serving institution.

We are encouraged that the findings of the supplemental report once again highlight that our decades of work of proactively addressing this issue have been largely effective, as evidenced by no known incidents in over 20 years, and over 90 percent of the known incidents occurring 40 to 60 years ago. And after implementing the special master’s recommendations to further strengthen our policies, we believe Catholics and the general public can feel confident that the Church is an extremely safe environment for children.

It is also important to note, that all people who participated in the reparations program had to report their allegation to law enforcement, and their allegations were independently reported by the dioceses as well. Therefore, we are confident that there are no priests in active ministry with known substantiated allegations against them.

Finally, we believe the comprehensive review of our policies, and the independent and non-adversarial reparations process, are models that can and should be duplicated to further address the societal-wide issue of sexual abuse of minors.

We agree with the Attorney General that other youth-serving institutions could consider using a similar public review and reparations program to address this issue.”