

June 7, 2007 – Portland, Ore., Archdiocese releases documents on priest abuses

Move is part of legal settlement

Seattle Post-Intelligencer (WA) AP

PORTLAND -- The Archdiocese of Portland released 30 previously secret documents Wednesday detailing sexual abuse of boys by priests.

They included psychological evaluations, allegations by victims and some candid detail of what went on between some priests and their young parishioners over several years. The documents make clear that church officials had been aware of abuse problems for years and refused to acknowledge them.

The archdiocese released the papers as part of a settlement agreed to in April. Portland lawyer Kelly Clark, who represented more than 40 abuse victims, said he was blindsided by the release of the documents on Wednesday.

He said the agreement with the archdiocese "included a joint presentation to the public, not only about what the documents are but what they mean." "I had absolutely no idea that it was coming today," he said. A statement by Archbishop John Vlazny said the records were released "as part of the process of healing and reconciliation."

He said most of the information in the documents was decades old, "when people did not have the benefit of today's knowledge and standards."

He said church officials did not always respond then as they might now and that a "modern and effective child protection program" is in place with updated policies to ensure safety.

Most or all of the priests named in the documents have retired and some have died. Some of the documents released Wednesday are rather candid.

One dated 1989 quoted a victim whose name was redacted as saying Father Rocky Perone, who was at St. Philip Neri parish in Portland in the 1950s, initiated the abuse in a confessional, where the boy had admitted "something like impure thoughts."

"The next day Father Perone asked him to come into a room and take down his pants and show him exactly what had happened and that he fondled him briefly," said a memorandum from The Rev. Charles Lienert, director of clergy personnel, to then-Archbishop William Leveda. It said the relationship progressed and lasted about six years. Perone also was the subject of other complaints. After months in treatment, Perone was placed in a parish in Texas, where the bishop was notified of his history. He was barred from contact with young people.

A 1995 document from Lienert to Leveda told of Father Aldo Orso-Manzonetta, who had parishes in Newberg and Tillamook and about whom parishioners often talked of sexual improprieties. The document quotes a person whose name is redacted as saying "Fr. Aldo's typical pattern in developing these emotional relationships is to heap gifts on a person and then only go as far as a person will allow him when he makes an advance."

A 1994 memo from Lienert told of a boy just out of juvenile detention who met a man claiming to be a church janitor and offered the boy money to spend the night with him. He learned the following Sunday that the "janitor" was Orso-Manzonetta, who he said always gave him some pills he later found to be barbiturates that made him vague about what was going on.

In 2004, the Portland Archdiocese became the first in the nation to file for bankruptcy protection because of the wave of abuse lawsuits. About 175 people who claimed they were molested by priests or other church officials have agreed to settle their cases for about \$52 million.