

TIMELINE OF THE CHURCH'S SEX ABUSE CRISIS
by Bishop Robert Barron / Word on Fire Institute / www.wordonfire.org

June 1985: The first public case breaks.

The issue of child sexual abuse priests is widely publicized when a Louisiana priest, Rev. Gilbert Gauthé, admits that he sexually abused 37 children— among them, altar boys and members of the parish Boy Scout troop.

It may have been [the first time](#) that a priest has faced such charges in an American court of law, according to *The National Catholic Reporter*, which had carried a number of articles on the case. Gauthé was sentenced to 20 years in prison, but released after 10 years.

1993, 1995, 1996: U.S. Ad Hoc committee recommends sexual abuse policies.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse formulates and recommends sexual abuse policies geared to combat sexual abuse by clergy. They are Restoring Trust Vol. I (1993), Restoring Trust Vol. II (1995), and Restoring Trust Vol. III (1996). Many dioceses instituted changes based on these policies; however, there is not universal adoption throughout the country.

March 1998: VIRTUS is created.

The National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc. (National Catholic) invites prominent national experts—experts in many disciplines—to discuss preventing child sexual abuse at a forum in Washington, DC. From those discussions, the initiative for the [VIRTUS programs](#) is created. Currently, 85 dioceses and archdioceses have implemented VIRTUS' *Protecting God's Children*[®] program for adults.

April 2001: Pope John Paul II issues a letter.

Pope John Paul II's letter of April 30, 2001, issued "motu proprio" (on his own initiative) states that "a sin against the Sixth Commandment of the Decalogue by a cleric with a minor under 18 years of age is to be considered a more grave delict, or 'delictum gravius.'"

It also states: "Reservation to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) is also extended to a delict against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue committed by a cleric with a minor below the age of eighteen years. §2 One who has perpetrated the delict mentioned in §1 is to be punished according to the gravity of the offense, not excluding dismissal or deposition."

In other words, the CDF was given a broader mandate to address the sex abuse cases only from 2001; prior to that date, the 1917 Code of Canon Law permitted sexual abuse cases by the clergy to be handled by the Congregation, for the Congregation to open cases itself, or for the Ordinary to handle judgment. All priestly sex crimes cases were placed under the CDF which, in the majority of cases, then recommended immediate action.

2002: Boston Abuse Scandal

In early 2002, *The Boston Globe* publishes results of an investigation that lead to the criminal prosecutions of five priests and thrusts the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy into the national spotlight. Former priest John Geoghan becomes a central figure in the clergy sexual abuse crisis in Boston, along with Cardinal Bernard Law who admitted receiving a letter in 1984 outlining allegations of child molestation against Geoghan. Law assigned Geoghan to another parish despite the allegation. From 1962 to 1995, Geoghan sexually abused approximately 130 people, mostly grammar school boys, according to victims. Church officials ordered him to get treatment or transferred him, but kept him on as a priest. Geoghan was found guilty of molesting a boy in a swimming pool and sentenced to prison in 2002.

Law resigns as archbishop of Boston in December 2002.

The Globe's coverage encourages other victims to come forward with allegations of abuse, resulting in numerous lawsuits and more criminal cases. Subsequent investigations and allegations reveal a pattern of sexual abuse and cover-ups in a number of large dioceses across the United States. The Boston case drew the attention, first of the United States and ultimately the world, to the sexual abuse crisis. The story was later adapted into the award-winning movie *Spotlight*.

April 2002: Pope John Paul II summons cardinals.

Pope John Paul II, despite being frail from Parkinson's disease, summons all the American cardinals to the Vatican to discuss possible solutions to the issue of sexual abuse in the American Church. He asks them to "diligently investigate accusations." John Paul II suggests that American bishops be more open and transparent in dealing with such scandals and emphasizes the role of seminary training to prevent sexual deviance among future priests. In what the *New York Times* calls "unusually direct language," John Paul condemns the arrogance of priests that led to the scandals: "Priests and candidates for the priesthood often live at a level both materially and educationally superior to that of their families and the members of their own age group. It is therefore very easy for them to succumb to the temptation of thinking of themselves as better than others."

The pope reads a statement intended for the American cardinals, calling sex abuse "an appalling sin" and saying the priesthood has no room for such men.

June 2002: The Dallas Charter is promulgated.

The USCCB perceives a lack of adequate procedures for the prevention of sexual abuse of minors, the reporting of allegations of such abuse, and the handling of those reports. In response to deficiencies in canonical and secular law, both ecclesiastical and civil authorities implement procedures and laws to prevent sexual abuse of minors by clergy and to report and punish it if and when it occurs.

The USCCB unanimously promulgates a Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which pledges the Catholic Church in the US to providing a "safe environment" for all children in Church-sponsored activities.

To accomplish this, the US bishops pledge to establish uniform procedures for handling sex-abuse allegations against lay teachers in Catholic schools, parish staff members, coaches, and other people who represent the Church to young people. The aim of the charter is the adoption of a "zero tolerance" policy for sexual abuse. The USCCB institutes reforms to prevent future abuse by requiring background checks for Church employees. They now require dioceses faced with an allegation to alert the authorities, conduct an investigation, and remove the accused from duty. To ensure that each diocese/eparchy in the United States has "procedures in place to respond promptly to allegations of sexual abuse of minors," the USCCB also issues "Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priest or Deacons."

April 2003: Pontifical Academy for Life organizes three-day conference.

The Pontifical Academy for Life organizes a three-day conference entitled "Abuse of Children and Young People by Catholic Priests and Religious," where eight non-Catholic psychiatric experts are invited to speak to representatives of nearly all of the Vatican dicasteries. The panel of experts identifies the following factors contributing to the sexual abuse problem:

- Failure by the hierarchy to grasp the seriousness of the problem.
- Overemphasis on the need to avoid a scandal.
- Use of unqualified treatment centers.
- Misguided willingness to forgive.
- Insufficient accountability.

February 2004: The John Jay Report is released.

The National Review Board engages the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York to conduct a study analyzing allegations of sexual abuse in Catholic dioceses in United States.

[The report](#) concludes that children accused more than 4,000 priests of sexual abuse between 1950 and 2002. The report states there were approximately 10,667 reported victims (younger than 18 years), and around 81 percent of these victims were male. 22% were younger than age 11, 51% were between the ages of 11 and 14, and 27% were between the ages of 15 and 17 years when first abused.

Although there are reported acts of sexual abuse of minors in every year, the incidence of reported abuse increased by several orders of magnitude in the 1960s and 1970s. There was, for example, a more than sixfold increase in the number of reported acts of abuse of males aged 11 to 17 between the 1950s and the 1970s. After peaking in the 1970s, the number of incidents in the report decreased through the 1980s and 1990s even more sharply than the incidence rate had increased in the 1960s and 1970s.

2006: Marcial Maciel is forced into retirement.

Pope Benedict XVI forces Marcial Maciel, the founding leader of the Legion of Christ, to retire from active ministry.

Since the 1970s, Maciel was accused of sexually abusing many minors, and fathered a total of six children by three different women.

Formal charges were filed against Maciel by nine men with the Vatican in 1998. Maciel and the Legion originally denied the accusations.

May 2009: The crisis hits Ireland.

A [bombshell report](#) commissioned by the Irish government—The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA), commonly known as the Ryan Commission—says testimony had demonstrated that Irish institutions for children treated them more like prison inmates and slaves than people with legal rights and human potential; that some religious officials encouraged ritual beatings and consistently shielded their orders amid a “culture of self-serving secrecy”; and that government inspectors failed to stop the abuses.

One writer [concludes](#): “The sheer scale and longevity of the torment inflicted on defenseless children—over 800 known abusers in over 200 institutions during a period of 35 years—should alone make it clear that it was not accidental or opportunistic but systematic.”

2011 – 2012: Pope Benedict XVI defrocks 400 priests.

A document obtained by the *Associated Press* shows that Pope Benedict XVI [defrocked nearly 400 priests](#) in 2011 and 2012. While it’s not clear why the numbers spiked in 2011, it could be because 2010 saw a new explosion in the number of cases reported in the media in Europe and beyond.

May 2011: The Vatican publishes new guidelines on clergy sex abuse.

The Vatican publishes new guidelines, drawn up by Cardinal William Levada, the head of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, on dealing with the clergy sexual abuse cases.

The guidelines tell the bishops and heads of Catholic religious orders worldwide to develop “clear and coordinated” procedures for dealing with sexual abuse allegations by May 2012. The guidelines instruct the bishops to cooperate with the police and respect the relevant local laws in investigating and reporting allegations of sexual abuse by the clergy to the civic authorities, but do not make such reporting mandatory. The guidelines also reinforce bishops’ exclusive authority in dealing with abuse cases.

Victims’ advocacy groups criticized the new guidelines as insufficient, arguing that the recommendations do not have the status of Church law and do not provide any specific enforcement mechanisms.

January 2013: The crisis hits Australia.

The Gillard Government institutes the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Commission reports that 7% of all Catholic priests in Australia were “alleged perpetrators of child sex abuse.” Most reported incidents of sex abuse occurred between 1950 and 1989, but some reported incidents occurred as early as the 1920s and the latest after 2010.

Australia’s Catholic leaders had been among the first in the world to publicly address management of child abuse. In 1996, the Church issued the Towards Healing Protocol, which it described as seeking to “establish a compassionate and just system for dealing with complaints of abuse.”

June 11, 2018: Pope Francis accepts resignations of three bishops in Chile.

Pope Francis [accepts](#) the resignations of three bishops in Chile. The highest-profile of those leaving his post was Bishop Juan Barros of Osorno, 61, who has been in the vortex of the abuse saga.

All of Chile’s 33 active bishops offered their resignations the previous month in an extraordinary act as part of the fallout from the scandal. But the pope had not responded officially to the offer until he accepted the resignation of the three prelates.

June 20, 2018: McCarrick is removed from ministry.

After [an internal investigation discovers credible evidence that McCarrick sexually abused a teenager](#) when he was a priest in Manhattan decades ago, [the retired cardinal is removed from the ministry](#) “at the direction of Pope Francis,” according to [a statement from the Archdiocese of New York](#).

McCarrick was informed several months before that the Archdiocese of New York, where he was an ordained a priest in 1958, was investigating an allegation of abuse from a teenager “from almost fifty years ago.” The cardinal said [he] was “shocked” by the report but cooperated with the investigation.

The Archdiocese of New York, which led the investigation, said it would not release specific details about the allegation to protect the victim’s privacy. But the archdiocese said a review board composed of jurists, law enforcement experts, parents, psychologists, a priest and a religious sister found the allegations against McCarrick to be “credible and substantiated.” The accusation was also turned over to law enforcement in New York, according to the archdiocese.

McCarrick declares his innocence, saying that he doesn't remember anything. The charges were that he had repeatedly stuck his hand down the teenager's pants, once while measuring the young altar boy's Christmas cassock in 1971, and again a year later when, after months of calling him "good-looking," he cornered him in a bathroom. (Both incidents occurred at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City.)

McCarrick is also accused of sexual misconduct with three adults when he was the archbishop in Newark, New Jersey, [according to the Archdiocese of Newark](#) and the Diocese of Methuchen.

Additionally, the [New York Times](#) quotes two former priests—Robert Hoatson, who runs a recovery center for those sexually abused by the clergy, and Richard Sipe, who studies these cases of sexual abuse—who allege that McCarrick had been coercing seminarians to sleep with him throughout the 80s and 90s.

McCarrick becomes the highest-ranking Catholic official to ever be removed from the ministry for sexual abuse against a minor.

June 28, 2018: Pope Francis accepts McCarrick's resignation as cardinal.

"Pope Francis accepted his resignation from the cardinalate and has ordered his suspension from the exercise of any public ministry, together with the obligation to remain in a house yet to be indicated to him, for a life of prayer and penance until the accusations made against him are examined in a regular canonical trial."

July 16, 2018: *The New York Times* reports on McCarrick.

The New York Times reports on additional charges that [some church officials had known about McCarrick's sexual abuse and harassment against seminarians for decades](#), and [that he had also abused an 11-year-old boy—"a close family friend"](#)—for close to 20 years.

July 20, 2018: An archbishop in Honduras resigns.

Pope Francis [accepts the resignation](#) of Juan José Pineda, auxiliary bishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, following a Vatican investigation into accusations of financial mismanagement and sexual misconduct against seminarians.

The bishop, 57, had long been the subject of accusations of financial misdealings, as well as rumors that he offered support to a male companion using archdiocesan funds. He served under papal advisor and archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga, who had also been accused of financial misconduct.

July 27, 2018: Abuse of Nuns

An *Associated Press* investigation found evidence that priests and bishops around the world have [abused Catholic nuns and sisters](#) for decades.

July 28, 2018: McCarrick resigns.

Pope Francis [accepts Cardinal McCarrick's resignation](#) from the College of Cardinals, in what is very likely [the first time a cardinal has stepped down because of sexual abuse accusations](#).

The Vatican statement noted: "Pope Francis accepted his resignation from the cardinalate and has ordered his suspension from the exercise of any public ministry, together with the obligation to remain in a house yet to be indicated to him, for a life of prayer and penance until the accusations made against him are examined in a regular canonical trial."

August 1, 2018: Cardinal Daniel DiNardo calls for action in the U.S.

In [a statement](#), DiNardo says:

“The accusations against Archbishop Theodore McCarrick reveal a grievous moral failure within the Church. They cause bishops anger, sadness, and shame; I know they do in me. They compel bishops to ask, as I do, what more could have been done to protect the People of God. Both the abuses themselves, and the fact that they have remained undisclosed for decades, have caused great harm to people’s lives and represent grave moral failures of judgment on the part of Church leaders.

These failures raise serious questions. Why weren’t these allegations of sins against chastity and human dignity disclosed when they were first brought to Church officials? Why wasn’t this egregious situation addressed decades sooner and with justice? What must our seminaries do to protect the freedom to discern a priestly vocation without being subject to misuse of power?

Archbishop McCarrick will rightly face the judgment of a canonical process at the Holy See regarding the allegations against him, but there are also steps we should be taking as the Church here in the United States. Having prayed about this, I have convened the USCCB Executive Committee. This meeting was the first of many among bishops that will extend into our Administrative Committee meeting in September and our General Assembly in November. All of these discussions will be oriented toward discerning the right course of action for the USCCB.”

August 7, 2018: The former president of Ireland speaks out.

Former president Mary McAleese [says](#) she refused to discuss an attempt by the Vatican in 2003 to secure an agreement with Ireland that it would not access Church documents.

Speaking to *The Irish Times*, McAleese reveals what she described as “one of the most devastating moments in my presidency.” It occurred during a State visit to Italy when she had a private meeting with then Vatican secretary of state Angelo Sodano.

“He indicated that he would like, and the Vatican would like, an agreement with Ireland, a concordat with Ireland. I asked him why and it was very clear it was because he wanted to protect Vatican and diocesan archives. I have to say that I immediately said the conversation had to stop,” McAleese says.

August 14, 2018: Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report

A [grand jury report](#) finds, after sifting through 2 million internal Church documents, that six dioceses in Pennsylvania—in Allentown, Erie, Greensburg, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and Scranton—[have previously covered for 300 priests who sexually abused at least 1,000 children since 1947.](#)

Pennsylvania’s attorney general, Josh Shapiro, says that it is the “largest, most comprehensive report into child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church ever produced in the United States.”

[A statement](#) from DiNardo says: “As a body of bishops, we are shamed by and sorry for the sins and omissions by Catholic priests and Catholic bishops.” Pope Francis [expresses “shame and sorrow”](#) over the allegations.

August 16, 2018: DiNardo calls for three “practical changes” in response to “spiritual crisis.”

In [a statement](#), DiNardo says:

“We are faced with a spiritual crisis that requires not only spiritual conversion, but practical changes to avoid repeating the sins and failures of the past that are so evident in the recent report. Earlier this week, the USCCB Executive Committee met again and established an outline of these necessary changes.

The Executive Committee has established three goals: (1) an investigation into the questions surrounding Archbishop McCarrick; (2) an opening of new and confidential channels for reporting complaints against bishops; and (3) advocacy for more effective resolution of future complaints. These goals will be pursued according to three criteria: proper independence, sufficient authority, and substantial leadership by laity.

We have already begun to develop a concrete plan for accomplishing these goals, relying upon consultation with experts, laity, and clergy, as well as the Vatican.”

August 20, 2018: Pope Francis comments on failures.

Following the news out of Pennsylvania, the [Vatican](#) releases [a letter from Pope Francis](#) in which he acknowledges the failures of the Church in combatting priests’ sexual abuse toward minors. “We showed no care for the little ones,” he writes. “We abandoned them.”

August 26, 2018: First Viganò letter is issued.

Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, a known conservative critic of Pope Francis and former Vatican diplomat to the United States, [publishes a 7,000-word letter](#) on the pontiff’s final day in Ireland, claiming that Francis helped cover up sexual abuse in the Church and calling for his resignation. In particular, [Viganò asserts](#) that the pope knew for years about the accusations against McCarrick and failed to act.

When asked about Viganò’s statements by reporters, however, Francis does not admit nor deny the accusations. “I will not say a single word about this,” he says. “I believe the statement speaks for itself. And you have the sufficient journalistic ability to make your conclusions. It’s an act of trust.”

August 27, 2018: DiNardo says he is “eager” to meet with Pope Francis.

In [a new statement](#), DiNardo says:

“I am eager for an audience with the Holy Father to earn his support for our plan of action. That plan includes more detailed proposals to: seek out these answers, make reporting of abuse and misconduct by bishops easier, and improve procedures for resolving complaints against bishops.”

August 29, 2018: Linker writes about leaving the Church.

Prominent writer Damon Linker pens an article titled [“The unbearable ugliness of the Catholic Church.”](#) in which he announces his decision to leave the Catholic Church: “To wade through the toxic sludge of the grand jury report; to follow the story of Theodore McCarrick’s loathsome character and career; to confront the allegations piled up in Viganò’s memo—it is to come face to face with monstrous, grotesque ugliness. It is to see the Catholic Church as a repulsive institution—or at least one permeated by repulsive human beings who reward one another for repulsive acts, all the while deigning to lecture the world about its sin. No thanks. I’m done. And I bet I’ll have a lot of company headed for the door.”

August 29, 2018: Cupich makes controversial comments.

Archbishop of Chicago Blase Cupich [dismisses](#) recent allegations made by a former Vatican ambassador to the U.S., saying that Pope Francis has a “bigger agenda” to worry about, including defending migrants and protecting the environment.

Speaking Aug. 27 to Chicago's NBC 5, Cupich says that the pope has "got to get on with other things, of talking about the environment and protecting migrants and carrying on the work of the Church."

Cupich describes the contents of Archbishop Carlos Maria Viganò's 11-page testimony, published Aug. 25, as a "rabbit hole" that he does not think the Church should be going down.

September 12, 2018: Pope Francis calls for a summit.

Pope Francis [calls for](#) all the presidents of the Catholic bishops' conferences of the world to meet at the Vatican in February to discuss the issue of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults.

A statement from the Pope's cardinal advisory board Sept. 12 says: "The Holy Father Francis, hearing the council of cardinals, decided to convene a meeting with the presidents of the bishops' conferences of the Catholic Church on the theme of 'protection of minors.'" The summit will take place at the Vatican Feb. 21-24, 2019.

September 12, 2018: Pope Francis' favorability plummets.

Pope Francis' favorability plummets in the United States in light of recent developments. [The CNN poll](#) conducted by SSRS found that less than half of Americans—48%—say they have a favorable view of the Pope, down from two-thirds who said the same in January 2017 and 72% who said so in December 2013, a few months after he was first elevated to the position.

September 12, 2018: The Diocese of Buffalo is under scrutiny.

Leaked Church records show that there were 106 clergy in the Diocese of Buffalo who had been credibly accused of sexually abusing children, far more than a list of 42 which had been released by Malone's Diocese in March of the year. Malone, along with many other former Bishops, has also been accused of shielding some of these "predator priests," as well as at least one nun, from potential prosecution and transferring some to other parishes to avoid scrutiny.

Malone has since [defended himself](#) as a "man of integrity" who made a "mistake."

September 13, 2018: Top U.S. prelates meet with Pope Francis.

[America's top prelates meet with the pontiff](#), seeking a robust investigation into how Vatican officials permitted one of America's top bishops, former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, to climb the hierarchy despite apparently knowing of allegations of his sexual misconduct.

Before the Americans could enter the pope's private office, the Church reveals that an investigation had in fact begun—just perhaps not the one they were expecting. While a Vatican statement announcing the noon meeting began by listing the American delegation, including the secretary general of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Msgr. Brian Bransfield, it concluded with the revelation that Francis had accepted the resignation of the monsignor's cousin, Bishop Michael J. Bransfield of West Virginia.

The pope, the statement says, had named a temporary administrator for the Wheeling-Charleston Diocese, Archbishop William E. Lori. Archbishop Lori promptly declares in his own statement that Francis had instructed him "to conduct an investigation into allegations of sexual harassment of adults against Bishop Bransfield."

[A statement from DiNardo](#) expresses gratitude at "a lengthy, fruitful, and good exchange" with Francis, concluding: "We look forward to actively continuing our discernment together identifying the most effective next steps."

September 25, 2018: The crisis hits Germany.

A report by the German Catholic Church [finds](#) that 3,677 children in Germany, mostly 13 or younger, had been sexually abused by Catholic clergy between 1946 and 2014. The country's justice minister was quoted as saying it was “probably only the tip of the iceberg.”

September 25, 2018: Pope Francis talks about the impact of scandals.

[Speaking about](#) a meeting with young people he had held earlier that day in Tallin, Estonia, Francis speaks of the damage which had been done to the faith of young people: “They [young people] are scandalized by incoherence, they are scandalized by corruption, and into this [scandal] of corruption enters that which you were under-lining: sexual abuse.”

He also stresses that the renewed seriousness with which the Church was prosecuting cases of abuse had yielded results, and he underscores his personal commitment to zero-tolerance, saying that he had never—and would never—extend pardons to convicted abusers: “I have received so, so many completed convictions from [the Congregation for] the Doctrine of the Faith and I have said [go] forward, forward, never have I signed a request for grace after a conviction. On this I do not negotiate, there is no negotiation.”

September 27, 2018: The second Viganò letter is issued.

Viganò released [a follow-up letter](#) (dated September 29). In this letter, Viganò explained why he had broken the “pontifical secret” by publishing his first letter. He criticizes Francis for not having responded directly to the original letter, but instead having compared his critics to Satan. Viganò states that it was Cardinal Marc Ouellet who had informed him of the sanctions that Benedict XVI had allegedly placed on McCarrick, and urged Ouellet to publicly confirm this claim.

October 3, 2018: There is a further drop in Francis' favorability.

Just three-in-ten American Catholics (31%) now say the pontiff is doing a “good” (18%) or “excellent” (13%) job of addressing the sex abuse scandal, according to a [new survey from Pew Research Center](#). This is much lower than the 54% who gave Francis good or excellent marks in February 2014 (almost a year after he became pope), and the 45% who did so at the beginning of 2018.

The new survey also finds a decline in American Catholics' overall approval of Pope Francis. Between January and September of this year, the share of Catholics who express a favorable view of the Pope has dropped from 84% to 72%.

October 7, 2018: DiNardo applauds Vatican statement.

In [a statement](#), DiNardo says:

“On behalf of my brother bishops in the United States, I welcome the statement of October 6 from the Holy See which outlines additional steps Pope Francis is taking to ensure the faithful are protected from the evil of sexual assault. The Holy Father's ‘pressing invitation to unite forces to fight the grave scourge of abuse within the Church and beyond’ has been and will continue to be diligently accepted by the bishops of the United States.”

October 7, 2018: Ouellet responds to Viganò.

Cardinal Ouellet [replies](#) to Viganò in a public letter. He confirms that during the papacy of Benedict XVI, McCarrick “had been requested not to travel or to make public appearances,” but insists that these restrictions should not be seen as “sanctions” or “formally imposed,” referring to them rather as “conditions and restrictions that he [McCarrick] had to follow on account of some

rumors about his past conduct.” He defends the decision not to impose formal sanctions on him, stating that this was a matter of “prudence” as there was not yet sufficient evidence to implicate him.

October 12, 2018: Pope Francis accepts Cardinal Wuerl’s resignation.

Pope Francis [accepts](#) the resignation of Cardinal Donald Wuerl, a trusted papal ally who became a symbol among many Catholics for what they regard as the Church’s defensive and weak response to clerical sex abuse. He is the first U.S. cardinal to resign his archdiocese as a result of the abuse crisis since Cardinal Bernard Law did so in 2002 for his failure to deal with abusive priests in Boston.

But even as Wuerl becomes one of the highest-profile prelates to step down in a year of prominent abuse scandals, Pope Francis offers the cardinal a gentle landing, praising him in a letter and allowing him to stay on as the day-to-day administrator of the Washington archdiocese until a successor is found.

In his letter, Francis said that Wuerl’s “nobility” had prompted him to step down, even though he had “sufficient elements” to justify his actions. “Of this, I am proud and thank you,” Francis wrote.

October 13, 2018: Pope Francis defrocks two Chilean bishops.

Pope Francis [expels](#) from the priesthood two retired Chilean bishops accused of abusing minors, and made it clear they had no possibility of appeal.

“The decision was adopted by the pope last Thursday, Oct. 11,” the Vatican says in a statement, “as a consequence of overt acts of abuse against minors.” The decision “does not allow for recourse,” the statement adds.

October 18, 2018: Feds serve subpoenas to Pennsylvania dioceses.

The U.S. Department of Justice [serves subpoenas](#) to several dioceses in the state of Pennsylvania, in what is believed to be a statewide move by federal authorities to investigate sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. The subpoenas ask for evidence that Catholic clergy or church workers may have transported children across state lines for illicit purposes or shared child pornography online or electronically

On October 23, the eighth diocese, Altoona-Johnstown, also confirmed it had received federal subpoenas, and, like the other Pennsylvania dioceses, said it would cooperate fully with the investigation.

October 19, 2018: The third Viganò letter is issued.

Viganò releases [a third letter](#) in which he alleged that, despite Ouellet’s denials, for years “the Holy See was aware of a variety of concrete facts” concerning McCarrick’s activities, and that documents proving this allegation are kept in the Vatican Archives. Concerning Ouellet’s response to the Archbishop’s second letter, which included heavy criticism, Viganò says, “Cardinal Ouellet concedes the important claims.” He denounces the “conspiracy of silence” in the Church hierarchy which he believes oppresses victims and protects abusers.

Viganò ends the letter by urging other bishops to come forward with what they knew: “You too are faced with a choice. You can choose to withdraw from the battle, to prop up the conspiracy of silence and avert your eyes from the spreading of corruption or choose to speak.”

October 23, 2018: Pope Francis calls for a spiritual retreat.

[News breaks](#) that Pope Francis has called on Catholic bishops nationwide to gather for a historic seven-day spiritual retreat at Mundelein Seminary in suburban Chicago in January as Church hierarchy grapple with the ongoing clergy sex abuse scandal. As chancellor of the seminary, Archdiocese of Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich will serve as host of the gathering, which could include some 300 bishops from around the country.

October 26, 2018: The DOJ sends request to dioceses.

The Department of Justice [sends](#) a sweeping request to every diocese in the United States not to destroy documents related to the handling of child sexual abuse, a sign that the federal investigation into the Church could grow far more extensive.

Catholic bishops are asked by the federal government to retain their files on a broad array of internal matters, including sexual abuse investigations, and the transfer of priests across state or international borders, or to treatment centers. The request includes documents contained in “secret archives”—the confidential files that are kept by each diocese.

October 27, 2018: The Synod on Youth document is released.

The [final document](#) from the Synod on Youth is released, which addresses the abuse crisis in sections 29 through 31. A rough translation of the Italian is as follows:

“The different kinds of abuse made by some bishops, priests, religious and laity provoke in those who are victims, among them many young people, sufferings that can last a lifetime and to which no repentance can be remedied. This phenomenon is widespread in society, it also affects the Church and represents a serious obstacle to its mission. The Synod reaffirms its firm commitment to the adoption of rigorous preventive measures that prevent its repetition, starting from the selection and training of those who will be entrusted with responsibilities and educational tasks... The Lord Jesus, who never abandons his Church, offers her the strength and the tools for a new journey. Confirming the line of timely ‘necessary actions and sanctions’ (FRANCESCO, *Letter to the People of God*, 20 August 2018, n.2) and aware that mercy demands justice, the Synod recognizes that addressing the issue of abuse in all its aspects, even with the precious help of young people, can really be an opportunity for a reform of epochal scope.”

October 29, 2018: Another nuncio comes forward.

Cardinal Agostino Cacciavillan states that he received a complaint about McCarrick in 1994 while serving as papal nuncio, and then forwarded it to Cardinal John O’Connor, who supposedly conducted an investigation that yielded nothing. Cacciavillan admits that he did not attempt to directly contact the Vatican.

October 31, 2018: Another bishop is accused.

Bishop Jenik in New York is accused of sexual misconduct. [In a letter](#), Cardinal Dolan writes: “The *Lay Review Board* has carefully examined the allegation, which concerns incidents from decades ago, and concluded that the evidence is sufficient to find the allegation credible and substantiated. Although Bishop Jenik continues to deny the allegation, he has stepped aside from public ministry and has moved out of his parish.”

November 2, 2018: A professor-priest warns of recent rise in abuse.

After years in decline, a professor-priest [warns](#) that Catholic clergy sex abuse [could be on the rise again](#). The professor’s report, founded on an analysis of relevant data, sees a rising trend in abuse, and argues that the evidence strongly suggests links between sexual abuse of minors and two

factors: a disproportionate number of homosexual clergy, and the manifestation of a “homosexual subculture” in seminaries.

“The thing we’ve been told about the sex abuse is that it is somehow very rare and declined to almost nothing today is really not true,” Father D. Paul Sullins, a Catholic priest and retired Catholic University of America sociology professor, tells a Nov. 2 press conference. “I found that clergy sex abuse did drop to almost nothing after 2002, but then it started to creep up,” he continues. “It’s been increasing. And there are signs that the bishops or the dioceses have gotten complacent about that.”

“It’s not at the great heights that it was in the mid-1970s, but it’s rising. And it’s headed in that direction,” he adds.

November 12, 2018: A report of abuse is made against J.R.R. Tolkien’s son.

A [report](#) emerges that the Archdiocese of Birmingham was apparently aware of sexual abuse by Father John Tolkien, son of novelist J.R.R. Tolkien, but never reported it until decades later.

The priest is believed to have denied allegations he made a group of scouts strip naked until his death in 2003. The alleged abuse happened in the 1950s, when Fr. Tolkien was based in Sparkhill, Birmingham. Investigators said there is evidence to suggest Fr. Tolkien admitted the abuse.

The evidence emerges in a note uncovered during a week-long series of hearings of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, which is examining the Archdiocese of Birmingham’s response to allegations made against four priests including Fr. Tolkien.

November 12, 2018: Vatican asks U.S. Bishops not to vote on new abuse crisis measures.

At the 2018 General Assembly for the US Bishops, a “disappointed” Cardinal DiNardo [announces](#) news he had received the day before the start of the meeting:

“At the insistence of the Holy See, we will not be voting on the two action items in our documentation regarding the abuse crisis—that is, the standards of accountability for bishops and the special commission for receiving complaints against bishops. The Holy See has asked that we delay voting on these so that our deliberations can inform, and be informed by, the global meeting of the conference presidents that the holy father has called for February 2019.”

In a statement after the assembly, DiNardo writes:

“When the summer’s news first broke, we committed to three goals: to do what we could to get to the bottom of the Archbishop McCarrick situation; to make reporting of abuse and misconduct by bishops easier; and, to develop a means of holding ourselves accountable that was genuinely independent, duly authorized, and had substantial lay involvement. Now, we are on course to accomplish these goals. That is the direction that you and the survivors of abuse across our country have given me for the February meeting in Rome.... We leave this place committed to taking the strongest possible actions at the earliest possible moment. We will do so in communion with the Universal Church. Moving forward in concert with the Church around the world will make the Church in the United States stronger, and will make the global Church stronger.”

November 28, 2018: Authorities raid Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

The Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office, the Texas Rangers, and the Conroe Police Department [raid](#) the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston’s Chancery, seeking files regarding the

investigation of Rev. Manuel La Rosa-Lopez, a former priest charged with four counts of indecency with a child in Montgomery County. Two boxes of “sex allegation files” and Cardinal Daniel DiNardo’s computer are among the items seized by authorities.

December 9, 2018: Statistical analysis seeks context for PA grand jury report.

A new statistical analysis [seeks to contextualize](#) data about child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy in Pennsylvania, four months after the grand jury report. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia commissioned the analysis, which was conducted by the law firm Lewis Roca Rothgerber Christie LLP. “What is true in Pennsylvania is also true on a national level,” the analysis reads, noting that nationally, 24.7 percent of women and 16 percent of men have experienced sexual abuse during their childhood.

December 12, 2018: Cardinal Pell is found guilty of sexual abuse.

Cardinal George Pell is [convicted](#) by an Australian court on charges of sexual abuse of minors. Pell, the highest-ranking Catholic prelate to be formally convicted for sexual offenses, is also [formally expelled](#) (along with Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz of Chile) from the Pope’s C-9 advisory council.

January 11, 2019: The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith finds McCarrick guilty.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, at the conclusion of a penal process, issued a decree finding Theodore Edgar McCarrick, archbishop emeritus of Washington, D.C., guilty of the following delicts while a cleric: solicitation in the Sacrament of Confession, and sins against the Sixth Commandment with minors and with adults, with the aggravating factor of the abuse of power. The Congregation imposed on him the penalty of dismissal from the clerical state.

February 13, 2019: The Congregation’s decree against McCarrick is confirmed.

The Ordinary Session (Feria IV) of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith considered the recourse McCarrick presented against the decision to remove him from the clerical state. Having examined the arguments in the recourse, the Ordinary Session confirmed the decree of the Congregation. The Holy Father has recognized the definitive nature of this decision made in accord with law, rendering it a *res iudicata* (i.e., admitting of no further recourse).

February 13, 2019: McCarrick is laicized.

In a widely expected yet still dramatic move, the Vatican announces that Pope Francis [approves the removal of Theodore McCarrick from the clerical state](#), colloquially known as “laicization” or “defrocking.” It is the most severe penalty in Church law for a clergyman, and the 88-year-old McCarrick becomes the most senior cleric to suffer it for crimes related to the clerical sexual abuse crisis.

February 15, 2019: McCarrick is notified.

The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith notifies McCarrick that they have confirmed the Congregation’s decree against him.

February 16, 2019: McCarrick is notified that he cannot appeal.

Pope Francis and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith block the possibility for McCarrick to appeal the decision to remove him from the clerical state.

February 21, 2019 – February 24, 2019: Pope Francis holds a summit in Rome.

Pope Francis holds [a summit on sexual abuse](#) in Rome, calling for “concrete and effective measures” in his opening address. “The holy People of God looks to us, and expects from us not simple and predictable condemnations, but concrete and effective measures to be undertaken. We need to be concrete.” [See emails for detailed information on summit proceedings.] John Allen concludes that despite the strong opening, “The pope’s verbiage at the end of the meeting, on the other hand, met with a far more mixed reaction,” and that activist groups were unhappy with the summit’s results. Bishop Accountability concluded: “The hope for change shifts back to the secular sphere... Alarmed by the summit’s failure to produce reform, survivors, activists and civil authorities will be galvanized.”

March 13, 2019: New Gallup Poll

[A new Gallup poll](#) finds an increasing percentage of Catholics are re-examining their commitment to the Catholic Church. 37% percent of U.S. Catholics, up from 22% in 2002, say news of the abuse has led them to question whether they would remain in the Church.

March 13, 2019: Pell is sentenced to six years.

Cardinal George Pell [is sentenced](#) to six years in prison by an Australian judge, with the possibility of parole once half the sentence has been served. A hearing on his appeal of the conviction is set for June 5-6.

March 19, 2019: Barbarin resigns, but Francis refuses to accept it.

French Cardinal Philippe Barbarin of Lyon [says](#) Pope Francis would not accept his resignation following his conviction for covering up clerical sexual abuse, so he has decided to step aside temporarily for the good of the archdiocese.

The cardinal had [met Pope Francis March 18](#) to hand in his resignation after a French court gave him a six-month suspended sentence in the cover-up case. In a statement published by the Archdiocese of Lyon March 19, Barbarin said Francis, “invoking the presumption of innocence,” declined to accept his resignation. The cardinal’s lawyers have filed an appeal of the conviction, which was handed down March 7 by a French court....

The court found Barbarin guilty of covering up abuse by Father Bernard Preynat, who ran a large Catholic Scout group in the 1970s and 1980s. Although Barbarin did not become head of the Lyon archdiocese until 2002, it was alleged that he had known of the abuse at least since 2010.

March 19, 2019: West Virginia AG files suit against diocese.

West Virginia’s attorney general [files a lawsuit](#) against a retired Catholic bishop and a diocese alleging that they knowingly employing pedophile priests and failed to conduct adequate background checks.

Attorney General Patrick Morrisey’s [suit](#) follows the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston’s disclosure last November of 18 priests who were credibly accused of having sexually abused children over a span from 1950 through last summer and another 13 who were accused in other states and then came to West Virginia, though no complaints were lodged against them there.

“The diocese and its bishops chose to cover up and conceal arguably criminal behavior of admitted child sex abusers,” the lawsuit says.

May 9, 2019: Pope Francis issues global standards.

[Pope Francis issues global standards](#) for reporting and investigating abuse. The Pope makes it mandatory for all clerics and members of religious orders to report cases of clerical sexual abuse to Church authorities, including when committed by bishops or cardinals. “It is good that procedures be universally adopted to prevent and combat these crimes that betray the trust of the faithful,” the document signed by Francis on May 7 says. The *motu proprio* is also designed to address the cover-up of clerical sexual abuse, “consisting of actions or omissions intended to interfere with or avoid civil investigations or canonical investigations, whether administrative or penal, against a cleric or a religious regarding” these crimes.

November 10, 2020: The Vatican releases a 449-page report on Theodore McCarrick.

In his General Audience of the following day, Pope Francis states, “I renew my closeness to the victims of sexual abuse and the Church’s commitment to eradicate this evil.”

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Some additional entries in 2019 have been added by Joel S. Peters.