

5 Philadelphia Priests Declared Unfit for Ministry

The Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, battered since 2011 by a high-profile child sex abuse scandal, said on Sunday it had found five priests previously placed on administrative leave, including one accused of sexual abuse, unsuitable to hold their ministry.

Following a church investigation Archbishop Charles J. Chaput determined that there was a substantiated case of sexual abuse of a minor against a 58-year-old priest identified as Michael A. Chapman, according to a church statement. It gave no further details on the allegation.

Chapman was not immediately available for comment.

The other four suspended priests were determined to have violated standards of behavior and boundaries, the church said without elaborating. A church document defines one of the boundaries as pertaining to appropriate behavior with children.

The church said it had already reported the allegations against the men to the Philadelphia district attorney's office, and an archdiocese spokesman said he was not aware of any criminal charges against the men.

Calls to the district attorney's office were not immediately returned on Sunday.

The move means the suspended priests can have no public ministry, administer sacraments, wear clerical garb or present themselves as priests. All the men declared unsuitable for their ministry on Sunday had been suspended for some time, with four of them dating back to 2011.

The allegations against the five grew out of a 2011 Philadelphia grand jury report that ended with the jailing of Monsignor William Lynn, the highest-ranking U.S. Catholic Church official convicted in a child sex abuse scandal.

Lynn, the one-time secretary of the clergy for the archdiocese, was convicted last year of endangering the welfare of a child by reassigning a priest with a history of sexual abuse to a Philadelphia parish that was unaware of his past.

Lynn's case is under appeal.

David Clohessy, director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, was critical of Chaput's handling of the investigation.

"There's only one reason to delay and to lump multiple accused predator priests together for one big announcement," Clohessy said before the church released its statement on Sunday.

"Chaput simply wants to try and make sure there's just one story about child-molesting clerics, not several stories."

Kenneth Gavin, the archdiocese spokesman, said on Sunday the grand jury found in its report that other cases should be studied, although no indictments were issued, and no names were listed at the time.

Gavin said the archdiocese launched its own investigation to seek other possible violations. Before Sunday, 26 priests were placed on leave since 2011, but eight of them were later found suitable for the ministry, and another nine were found unsuitable.

In addition to Chapman, the other priests whose suspensions were announced on Sunday ranged in age from 40 to 75. One is a 75-year-old former military chaplain for the Pennsylvania National Guard and U.S. Air Force, who has also served in

parish schools.

Also on Sunday, two priests were cleared by the church of any wrongdoing. Gavin said a decision has not been made about what may come next for them.

Separately in Minnesota, Archbishop John Nienstedt of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis apologized on Sunday for having “overlooked” the problem of sexual abuse by priests.

These were his first public comments on the matter since the archdiocese was forced this month by a judge to release the names of about 30 priests suspected of abusing minors over a span of decades.

“When I arrived here seven years ago one of the first things I was told is that this whole question of clerical sexual abuse had been taken care of,” Nienstedt told reporters after addressing parishioners at Our Lady of Grace Church in Edina, southwest of Minneapolis.

“Unfortunately I believed that.”

In videotaped comments posted on the Star Tribune newspaper’s website, Nienstedt said he wanted to “hold up the 97 percent of our priests who are honest, noble, hardworking, selfless individuals.”

A spokesman for the archdiocese did not immediately respond to requests seeking comment.

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