



**ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA
OFFICE FOR COMMUNICATIONS**

222 North Seventeenth Street • Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103-1299
Telephone (215) 587-3747 • communof@adphila.org • www.archphila.org

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CONTACT: Donna Farrell
p: 215-587-3747
c: 215-651-3574

**ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA PLACES
21 PRIESTS ON ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE**

Cardinal Justin Rigali, Archbishop of Philadelphia, today announced that he has placed 21 priests on administrative leave. The action follows an initial examination of files looking at both the substance of allegations and the process by which those allegations were reviewed. In each case the next step is a thorough independent investigation.

Cardinal Rigali said, “These have been difficult weeks since the release of the Grand Jury Report: difficult most of all for victims of sexual abuse, but also for all Catholics and for everyone in our community.

“As we strive to move forward today,” Cardinal Rigali added, “I wish to express again my sorrow for the sexual abuse of minors committed by any members of the Church, especially clergy. I am truly sorry for the harm done to the victims of sexual abuse, as well as to the members of our community who suffer as a result of this great evil and crime.”

The Grand Jury Report identified 37 cases of concern. In addition to the 21 announced today, three priests were placed on administrative leave after the report was released in February. Five others would have been subject to administrative leave. However, one who was already on leave and two who are incapacitated have not been in active ministry. Two others no longer serve in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and, as both are members of a Religious Order, the Archdiocese has notified the Superiors of their Religious Orders and the Bishops of the Dioceses where they are residing.

The remaining eight priests will not be subject to administrative leave. The initial independent examination of these cases found no further investigation is warranted.

All 37 cases were subject to a review using the Pennsylvania Crimes Code, the Child Protective Services Act, the “Essential Norms” from the *Charter for the Protection of Young People of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, and the Archdiocese’s *Standards for Ministerial Behavior and Boundaries*. The cases of those on administrative leave involve a range from allegations of sexual abuse of a minor to boundary issues with minors.

Cardinal Rigali stated, “Since 2005, the Archdiocese has worked very hard and we believed that we were on the right path, making significant progress in the protection of children and in the investigation and handling of abuse allegations. In fact, the present investigation of sexual abuse began as a result of reports from the Archdiocese to the District Attorney’s Office. The 2011 Grand Jury Report, however, presented us with serious concerns that demand a decisive response.”

Administrative Leaves Continued:

Within a week of the release of the Grand Jury Report, the Archdiocese retained Gina Maisto Smith, a former Philadelphia Assistant District Attorney who has prosecuted child sexual assault cases for nearly two decades. Mrs. Smith, a partner at the law firm of Ballard Spahr, conducted an initial review of all 37 cases of concern with the aid of her team and a forensic psychiatrist.

“Cardinal Rigali asked me to assist him in responding to the concerns raised in the Grand Jury Report,” Mrs. Smith said. “I was given the unlimited freedom to do a thorough review with full access to all files and documents.”

The Cardinal’s actions were based on Mrs. Smith’s recommendations. She will now lead a team of experts to investigate more fully each case. Her team will include a nationally renowned pediatrician in the field of child abuse, a forensic psychiatrist and psychologist, an expert from the child advocacy community and other experts.

Cardinal Rigali said, “I want to be clear: These administrative leaves are interim measures. They are not in any way final determinations or judgments.”

“I know that for many people their trust in the Church has been shaken,” stated the Cardinal. “I pray that the efforts of the Archdiocese to address these cases of concern and to re-evaluate our way of handling allegations will help rebuild that trust in truth and justice.”

For more information and to read Cardinal Rigali’s complete statement, visit the Archdiocese of Philadelphia web site at www.archphila.org (“Response to 2011 Grand Jury Report”).

Cardinal Rigali will celebrate Ash Wednesday Mass at 12:05 p.m. Wednesday, March 9, 2011 at the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent for Christians throughout the world. Lent is the penitential season of prayer and sacrifice lasting from Ash Wednesday through Holy Thursday, in preparation for Easter.

Cardinal Rigali also has invited the faithful to join him at the Cathedral for a Penitential Service, including Stations of the Cross, at 7 p.m. March 11, 2011, the first Friday of Lent.

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EDITOR’S NOTE: For Ash Wednesday Mass on March 9 and the Penitential Service on March 11, an audio and video mult-box feed will be provided in the parking lot of the Cathedral. Please enter on 17th Street, between Race and Vine Streets. Crews will need a bnc connector and recording deck or a live truck. Television cameras will not be permitted in the Cathedral. Reporters and still photographers will be permitted in the Cathedral.