

Archdiocese of Santa Fe  
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## OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

February 14, 2025

Dear Brother Priests, Deacons and their Wives, Religious and Lay Faithful,

In Thursday's Albuquerque Journal the front page carried a summary of a report by Searchlight. It lacked important information that I wish to share with you in this letter since you may receive comments or questions about the piece.

First, names published on our archdiocesan list of credibly accused priests must first be vetted by our Independent Review Board. The Board investigates those priests whose names are brought forward by a sexual abuse claimant. The Board, in keeping with archdiocesan policies, considers many factors, but always puts the claimant and his/her concerns first. The Board also respects the rights of accused priests. Hence, the Board's investigation is thorough, carefully conducted, and intended to be fair to all parties. The burden of proof is not as high as in a court of law, especially since claimants are often afraid to come forward and the events at issue are usually several decades in the past. Furthermore, many of the accused priests have passed away and are unable to participate. Still, the Board can come to a reasonable determination as it considers many factors in its deliberations.

Second, the bankruptcy claims are not necessarily the same as claims brought before the Board. The archdiocese's credibly accused list was published prior to the bankruptcy case and continues to be updated employing the process established several years ago. As mentioned above, only those priests investigated by our Independent Review Board are put on our list. That did not change as a result of the bankruptcy case. Some of the priest perpetrators named in the bankruptcy were already on our list of credibly accused priests and some were not. The archdiocese's board continues to consider accused clergy for the credible accused list as it always has. Clergy accused in the bankruptcy case are not *automatically* added to the list or considered by the board.

Third, the archdiocese accepted and settled all of the claims asserted in the bankruptcy case. As a result of lengthy and arduous negotiation, the archdiocese did not investigate those claims, but accepted them for purposes of the bankruptcy settlement. Ultimately, the claims were vetted by third parties agreed to in the bankruptcy case but, by agreement, the archdiocese had no involvement in that process. There is no validity to the suggestion in the article that an accusation

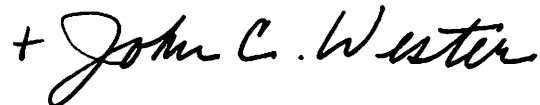
must be credible because the claimant received a certain settlement. Of course, it is right and just that the claimants received compensation but, the archdiocese had no involvement in determining how much a claimant received.

The Archdiocese of Santa Fe worked hard to bring some measure of justice and relief to the sexual abuse claimants. As you know, the effort was archdiocesan wide and all our parishes contributed heroically. Furthermore, there are quite a few lists of priests accused of pedophilia that can be accessed by anyone with a computer.

I note in closing that there were hints of bias in the reporting. For example, one might conclude that I changed my first answer to the interviewer. In fact, I did not understand the question and once I did, I got back to him with my answer. Also, the story could lead the reader to think that the judge in our case was prejudiced in our favor. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Please continue to join me as we commit ourselves to keeping our archdiocese safe for children and young people. And keep all survivors of sexual abuse in your good prayers. The sexual abuse of a minor is a terrible crime, one that, as Father Ron Rolheiser, OMI, says "shreds the human soul." I am grateful to our Independent Review Board for their vigilance and their dedication to keeping the Archdiocese of Santa Fe true to its pledge to create and maintain a safe environment for all our children.

Sincerely yours in the Lord Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ John C. Wester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend John C. Wester  
Archbishop of Santa Fe