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Credibly Accused Priest Returned to Ministry

On Monday, October 15th, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia announced its decision to restore Rev. Joseph DiGregorio to ministry, a priest credibly accused of the sexual exploitation of a minor.

http://www.philly.com/philly/news/breaking/20121015_Archdiocese_restores_72-year-old_Philadelphia_priest_to_ministry.html

It did so while releasing as little information as possible.

The archdiocese's poor record of accountability and transparency began to become known as early as 2002 when on April 26th then Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua was quoted on a CNN News night report saying, "We all are agreed that no priest guilty of even one act of sexual abuse of a minor will function in any ecclesial ministry or any capacity in our diocese."

That was 2002.

Later the 2005 and 2011 grand jury reports highlighted in graphic detail the lack of accountability and transparency shown by three Philadelphia archbishops — Cardinals Krol, Bevilacqua and Rigali.

Is there really a reason why faith should be put in this latest decision by the present Archbishop Charles Chaput to return DiGregorio to ministry without more information being released to the public? Chaput admitted in his statement Monday that DiGregorio was found to have violated the church's behavioral standards for priests.

What exactly were the charges? What was the supporting evidence? Did that evidence include records, documents, correspondence and the like? And what about the second priest, the Rev. William Santry, who admitted to sexually abusing Barbara Dellavecchia at the same Our Lady of Loreto Parish in West Philadelphia and who was subsequently removed from the priesthood?

What information does Chaput have that makes him so confident that simply because there have been no accusations reported to the archdiocese in 40 years that more victims don't exist and that DiGregorio poses no current risk?

Should people put their faith in the archdiocesan review board?

Even after the release of the 2011 Grand Jury Report on the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, its review board was not given access to all the information the archdiocese had on clerics accused of sexually exploiting minors. In fact, at that time the review board was not being given all the names of the accused let alone all the information on the few names they were given.

According to the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People adopted by the bishops no one with even one credible accusation of the sexual exploitation of a child is to be returned to ministry in the Roman Catholic Church.

Has that changed?

Philadelphia Catholics realized in 2011 that their faith in Cardinal Rigali's promises after the release of the 2005 grand jury report was misplaced. Charles Chaput, who became Philadelphia's archbishop in 2011, has yet to demonstrate the kind of accountability and transparency that would inspire one to trust his decisions without something more tangible than just his words to support them.

"I found him suitable for ministry," is simply not enough.

Our church hierarchy lost that kind of faith and trust when it chose to ignore Jesus' mandate to protect children in favor of enabling and protecting sexual predators.

There is no margin for error where the safety of children is concerned.

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