The Diocese of Burlington this week published a report listing the names of diocesan clergy who, since 1950, have had a credible and substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor made against them. With one exception, all of these acts occurred more than 20 years ago. None of these priests are in ministry; most of them are deceased. While most of these allegations took place at least a generation ago, the numbers are still staggering; the victims of these priests are still bearing the wounds of what happened to them. Until now, the scope of all of this has been our “family secret.”

Family secrets can be toxic. Harmful past experiences — unspoken, unaddressed, and known only by a few — fester like neglected wounds. The innocent victims of the family secret are often made to feel ashamed about what happened as no one seems to listen to them or even, sadly at times, believe them. While these secrets remain hidden, those who have been hurt are often unable to find the healing they need, especially if those who harmed them are still “part” of the family, even if only in memory.

The Church is not immune to this reality. We often talk about the Church as a family, as a community of faith in which we are brothers and sisters in our love for God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are supposed to be a people of love, a place of hope, and a community of healing. But that is not always the case. This is especially true with the significant number of cases involving the sexual and physical abuse of children by clergy, not just here in Vermont, but in the entire Church. These “sins of the past” continue to haunt us. These shameful, sinful, and criminal acts have been our “family secret” for generations. While there has been significant action by the Church here in Vermont and in the United States to address the issue of the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and the cover-up of those crimes by those in authority, the whole sordid tale of what happened in decades leading up to the U.S. bishops’ 2002 Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People has not been fully aired. That is why I have asked that this report be compiled and published.

When I arrived in Vermont four years ago as the 10th bishop of Burlington, I promised to continue the Diocese’s efforts to address past abuses of children by clergy, to work toward healing for those who have experienced abuse, to maintain a zero-tolerance policy for any individual with a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse, and to be transparent about the prevention, handling, and response to the sexual abuse of minors. In order to do so, it is clear to me that we must be fully honest about these sins of our past. If only a list of priests with credible allegations of sexual abuse of a minor had been released 15 years ago, perhaps we would be farther along our collective path of healing. But for many reasons, this was not able to happen.

In November 2018, as part of my personal commitment and that of the Diocese of Burlington to transparency regarding abuse by clergy, an independent, volunteer committee of four lay men and three lay women assembled to review clergy personnel files pertinent to any past allegation of abuse of a minor and to create a list of priests who have been credibly accused of sexually abusing a minor. Working completely independent of the Diocese, the committee only met with me twice, in the beginning and at the end of the process. I am grateful to the individuals who served on the file review committee, volunteering more than eight months of their time.
time to thoroughly review files and materials and to compile a report of their findings. As promised, I am publishing the committee’s report as it was presented to me without any edits or changes. It can be viewed at vermontcatholic.org/promise.

In addition to confronting the sins of the past, we must remain vigilant in ensuring these sins do not occur in the future. I have listened to the stories of victims of clergy sexual abuse and will continue to do so. They need to hear over and over again that we believe them. They also need to know that we are doing everything we humanly can to make sure this does not happen again. The Church in the United States has put in place policies and procedures to make the Catholic Church one of the safest places for children today. In 2002, the Diocese of Burlington adopted the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which requires: mandatory reporting of all abuse allegations to civil authorities; removal of credibly accused clerics from active ministry; background checks of all priests, staff and volunteers; training to recognize and prevent abuse; and many other proactive steps to ensure the safety of all members of our Church family. As a result of our rigorous efforts, since 2002 there has been only one credible and substantiated claim of abuse against a priest in the Diocese of Burlington. There are no priests in ministry in Vermont who have had a credible and substantiated allegation made against them.

As has been the case for the past 17 years, I, along with the clergy, staff and volunteers of the Diocese, are committed to supporting and caring for all victims of abuse and will continue to work to ensure safe environments for all God’s people — especially children, youth and vulnerable individuals — in which no form of harassment, sexual or otherwise, is tolerated. If you have been abused or if you suspect a minor or vulnerable person has been abused, contact the proper authorities immediately, including local law enforcement and the Diocese’s Victim Assistance Line at 866-485-2488.

Please visit vermontcatholic.org/promises for regular updates, frequently asked questions and more information regarding the Diocese’s promise to protect children and vulnerable persons entrusted to our care.

The greater family of the Catholic Church is in much need of healing. Together, we can mend our family’s discord and, by the grace of God, ensure that these sins do not happen again.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Christopher J. Coyne
Bishop of Burlington

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**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**08|28 WEDNESDAY**
St. Anne’s Shrine Summer Reflection Series
St. Anne’s Shrine, Isle La Motte • 11:15 am - 1 pm
Begins with Mass at 11:15. Our final date is August 28, with Rev. Richard Berube, S.S.E., Surprising Conversions: Peter, Paul and the Woman at the Well.

**09|05 THURSDAY**
Life of St. Br. André of St. Joseph’s Oratory
Mary Queen of All Saints, Hardwick • 4 - 7 pm

**09|07 SATURDAY**
Chicken Pie Supper by Maybelle Dumont
Our Lady of the Angels, Randolph • 5 pm
Join us for our 10th annual fundraising supper. Chicken, vegetables, rolls, desserts and beverages, and time for the two of you for a minimal fee of $20 per couple.

**09|08 SUNDAY**
St. Luke Children’s Carnival
St. Luke Fairfax • 11:30 am - 1 pm
Hosted by Knights of Columbus Council 10830. Event is open to Children of All Ages.

**09|13 FRIDAY-SATURDAY**
Young Adult Retreat Dumaine
Dumaine Retreat Center, Jacksonville
Arrive 7 pm Friday, depart, 6 pm Saturday. For Young Adults ages 18-39. Cost: $65, includes meals and lodging. Led by Sisters from the Daughters of Saint Paul.

**09|14 SATURDAY**
Padre Pio Devotions
Holy Family, Essex Junction • 8 - 10 am
Rosary at 8 am followed by Mass, then learning about Padre Pio’s life, ministry and spiritual gifts will follow in the Holy Family Parish Hall after Mass.

**09|20 FRIDAY**
Married Couples Date Night for Empty Nesters
Assumption of the BVM, Middlebury • 6:30 - 8:30 pm
Add some more romance and intimacy to your marriage! Get out and have some fun! Your date night includes appetizers, beverages, and time for the two of you for a minimal fee of $20 per couple. RSVP by Sept. 16 to: tmccormack@vermontcatholic.org or (802)658-6110 x1451

**09|21 SATURDAY**
Living the Catholic Faith to the Full
Immaculate Heart of Mary, Williston • 8 - 10:30 am
Knights of Columbus Men’s Spiritual Development Workshop. Fr. Henry Furman will be the guest speaker. All men are invited to attend. Light Refreshments will be provided.

**FOR MORE INFO: and/or to register by September 5,**
Sharon (802) 877-6585.

**09|07 SATURDAY**
Our Lady of Fatima Devotions
Holy Family, Essex Junction • 8 - 9:30 am
Join us the first Saturday of every month for Our Lady of Fatima Devotions. We begin with rosary and reconciliation at 8 am, followed by Mass at 8:30.

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