



Jan. 30, 2024

To the judges,

The Baltimore Sun in 2023 spent eight months building the largest and only [searchable database](#) of 309 people with ties to the Catholic Church who were accused of child sexual abuse or misconduct and lived or worked anywhere in Maryland, regardless of where the alleged acts occurred.

[Published in December](#), the database adds 107 names, researched by Sun reporters, to the people listed in the attorney general report issued in April. The tool allowed former students, campers and workers to make connections to the people and parishes involved in the abuse and its cover-up.

The Sun developed the database in part because neither the church nor the attorney general's office has one, nor are their public lists comprehensive. We decided before publication to make and keep the database outside the paywall as a community service. The Sun also advised members of the community how to: process the difficult information, send us fresh tips to investigate, and report incidents of abuse to people who can help them.

The Sun's coverage of eight decades of abuse in Baltimore's Catholic archdiocese and elsewhere in Maryland exposed church leaders still seeking secrecy, aided passage of a new state law, prompted resignations and spurred further investigation.

While The Sun has reported for decades on church abuse cases, a statewide reckoning was overdue. A late Baltimore cardinal was cited in a 2018 grand jury report in Pennsylvania, indicating that there were still-uncovered systemic issues. As survivors pressed the Maryland attorney general to investigate, The Sun began tracking their efforts. By late 2022, we knew that the attorney general's investigation was complete

and our staff prepared to uncover what the report contained, what it missed, its impact on the legal and political landscape, and whether it resulted in greater accountability.

The attorney general's report was sealed for five months from the time we learned it was complete until a judge approved the first release of a redacted version. The Archdiocese of Baltimore paid for attorneys for employees and former employees who are fighting in court to keep their names redacted. The archdiocese filed for bankruptcy, halting the public filing of new lawsuits (despite a change in state law that ended a statute of limitations). Some of those accused of abuse threatened reporters, directly and through attorneys, with legal action. It was essential to build trust with survivors who faced skepticism and denial in the past. Ultimately, the attorney general's report addressed abuse in only one geographic area of the state, meaning we had to find sources and data regarding abuse elsewhere.

The Sun's reporting is distinctive in several ways. While scandal in the Catholic Church in the U.S. erupted more than 20 years ago, we sought to show how church leaders still respond behind closed doors. At the same time, they remain in public posts and ministries despite roles in suppressing or failing to address the crisis. Another difference is depth and context: The majority of news outlets either simply covered the attorney general's report and news conferences, or [cited our reporting later](#). None analyzed the state investigation for its failings, as The Sun did, nor did any others go beyond it to look into abuse in the Archdiocese of Washington or the Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware, which also operate in Maryland. Our scrutiny of those cases and the building of an up-to-date, statewide, searchable database is unique.

Also, The Sun's staff investigated each alleged abuser carefully and sought details and comments from each, rather than simply reissuing the attorney general's list. That resulted in The Sun withholding the name of one person, who was alleged to have been abused themselves as a child in the church and who hasn't been reached for an interview. One outlet investigated [several individual priests accused of abuse](#), but did not hold those with the greatest authority in the church responsible nor match overall the breadth and depth of our public service reporting.

A [website that tracks abuse allegations](#) did not publish an article itself, but after the state investigation was released, sent reporters a letter it found in documents filed in a federal court case. That letter, confirmed by The Sun, helped this news organization name a bishop among five high-ranking church officials we identified whose names

were redacted in the state investigation.

Our news-breaking coverage of the investigation, of [the then-pending report and of the church's efforts to help withhold information in it](#) helped form the climate in which the General Assembly passed a [state law](#) that ended a statute of limitations in child sexual abuse cases (this bill failed in previous years). The Sun's revelation of the identities of church leaders and staff who played roles in the scandal and still held church positions [resulted in](#) three [resignations and the cancellation of a planned promotion](#).

Survivors of abuse and [fellow advocates said The Sun's work validated their experiences](#) and would help others come forward for the first time. During our special video report on the investigation and on our coverage, the [Maryland attorney general apologized to survivors](#) for how long the investigation took.

Survivors, many of whom don't tell anyone about abuse until later in life, have said public acknowledgment of reports is important. They say it helps other victims make connections about their cases and shows the size of the problem. They've also emphasized it can be validating for people who weren't taken seriously regarding what they suffered as children at the hands of a worldwide institution aware of widespread problems within its ranks.

We're honored to nominate the Maryland Catholic Church abuse searchable database for the Best Moves award. Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Trif Alatzas', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Trif Alatzas  
Publisher & Editor-in-Chief  
The Baltimore Sun