



A Conversation with Abbot John Klassen, OSB, Regarding the Transparency Initiative

Saint John's Abbey voluntarily released comprehensive personal files of 18 monks who likely offended against minors. The release of the files is part of a decades-long commitment by the abbey to prevent sexual abuse of children, to help the healing of survivors and to hold offending monks accountable.

"The files reflect all the effective actions that have been taken in the past quarter-century to publicly reach out to other survivors of abuse and to implement effective policies and actions to stop additional incidents of abuse. As a direct result of the effective actions documented in the files, we know of no incident of sexual abuse of a minor by a monk of Saint John's in more than two decades," said Abbot John Klassen, OSB.

Q: Why are you releasing the files now?

Abbot John: The comprehensive files published at www.MNTransparencyInitiative.com were voluntarily given to the Jeff Anderson & Associates law firm in 2015 with the expectation that the law firm would publish the files in their entirety. In November 2015, excerpted information from only five of the 18 files was disclosed. We felt that with the release of the files of only five monks and the selective highlighting of items in the files, including in some cases, factual errors, misunderstandings were created. Survivors were not being well served. We felt it best to take matters into our own hands and release the comprehensive files of all 18 monks.

Q: What distinguishes the release of these files from other information that has been published by Saint John's?

Abbot: We know of no institution that has published such complete information about those against whom there are credible allegations of abuse. These files are extraordinary in their breadth. With the cooperation of the affected monks, the files include detailed, personal information on the monks that is protected by state and federal privacy laws. The information disclosed goes beyond what the abbey and monks are obligated to do and far beyond what the abbey has agreed to in previous settlements or what any court has – or, for that matter, could -- order.

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Q: Is the Transparency Initiative something new?

Abbot: The name, Transparency Initiative, captures a 30-year record of the abbey taking effective actions to reach out to survivors, to hold offending monks accountable and to prevent abuse. Those who review the files will see a decades-long record of the abbey making public the names of monks who have offended, public outreach through the media to other potential survivors and a history of effective actions the abbey has taken to prevent abuse. The actions have been extraordinary and effective. We know of no incident of sexual abuse of a minor by a monk of Saint John's in more than two decades.

Q: Why aren't the files of other monks who have been accused of abuse included?

Abbot: The abbey has released comprehensive files of all monks who likely have offended against minors. When credible allegations have been presented, the abbey rigorously has implemented its sexual abuse policy regardless of the monk involved. This policy requires a thorough investigation of the claim by an expert, objective third-party. While some allegations have garnered headlines, the detailed and objective investigation found the claims to be unsubstantiated. The files released in the Transparency Initiative are those of all the monks, past and present, who have likely offended against minors. Claims that there are other offenders are simply false.

Q: How do the files help survivors of abuse?

Abbot: The release of the files is an acknowledgement of the harm that has been done. The files share heartbreaking and tragic details of suffering inflicted on survivors of misconduct. We in the monastic community grieve the pain and suffering of those who have been harmed, whose lives have been diminished by the pain they suffered. Survivors will find in these files a commitment to holding accountable those monks who have offended and a consistent record of effective actions to prevent abuse. It also is important that survivors – those who have come forward and those who have not yet made that decision – have complete and accurate information. The files provide that information.

Q: Is the information in the files relevant to others?

Abbot: Absolutely. It is important to evaluate the files in the context of a journey the abbey has been taking for the past quarter century or more. The release of the files is not the destination. The destination is defined by three critical goals:

First, contributing to the healing of survivors;

Second, holding accountable those monks who have offended; and,

Third, preventing new incidents of abuse.

The importance of the files and their release is not so much in their detail -- although, we are hopeful that survivors will see in the detail the abbey's commitment to acknowledging the harm that has been done and the priority we have placed on accountability -- but the record the files collectively show of the abbey's initiatives to reach out to survivors and to prevent new cases of abuse. What often gets lost in today's headlines is that because of the effective actions the abbey has taken we know of no incident of sexual abuse of a minor by a monk of St. John's in more than two decades.