

Archdiocese of Philadelphia: Office for Clergy

PRAYER AND PENANCE PROGRAM

About the Program:

In 2005, Cardinal Justin Rigali established the Prayer and Penance Program under the Office for Clergy in response to the sexual abuse crisis within the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. This program is designed to provide for the supervision and treatment of Archdiocesan priests who, having committed and acknowledged sexual abuse of a minor, voluntarily accepted the permanent restriction of their ministry and a life of prayer and penance in lieu of the canonical penal process. [See below for more details about Canon Law.]

The Prayer and Penance Program is predicated upon the collaboration of supporting elements that include sex offender specific treatment, individual monitoring and spiritual guidance with a primary focus on victim safety. A criterion for admission is an agreement to the “Standards of Accountability,” which include general behavior and house rules in addition to specific treatment and/or supervision requirements based on their individuals needs and victim safety issues. Individuals currently reside in a communal setting in a facility on Archdiocesan property, where they are under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop and able to move about the community on their own. Their whereabouts and other activities are pre-approved and monitored.

The priests in the Prayer and Penance Program have not been removed from the clerical state; however, their ministry has been permanently restricted. They may not celebrate Mass publicly, they may not administer any sacraments, they may not wear clerical garb, and they may not present themselves as priests. They may, in the privacy of the Prayer and Penance Program, celebrate Mass with other Prayer and Penance Program participants.

Q: Where is the Prayer and Penance Program located?

A: The Prayer and Penance Program is located in Darby, Delaware County, Pa. It is on the campus of Villa Saint Joseph, a home for retired priests.

Q: How are these priests monitored?

A: The program employs a full-time monitor, who is a former probation officer. The monitor reviews schedules, investigates locations as needed, and ensures compliance with the general and specific conditions of the “Standards of Accountability.” The facility at which the program participants live is equipped with a swipe card system and video monitoring system to assist staff in monitoring program participants, not only when they are on site but also when they enter or leave the facility.

Q: What type of treatment do the priests in the program receive?

A: Prior to admission to the program, priests must undergo a thorough evaluation that includes a review of their Archdiocesan file, a psychological evaluation and an outsourced sex offender assessment. The sex offender assessment includes the use of the polygraph and other state-of-the-art actuarial diagnostic tools based on the latest research in the area of sex offender treatment and management. This sex offender assessment is currently outsourced to the Joseph J. Peters Institute in Philadelphia. The evaluation forms the basis of the individual’s treatment plan, which for most program participants includes both individual and group sex offender treatment.

Q: Are all priests with substantiated allegation of sexual abuse of a minor admitted to the Prayer and Penance Program?

A: As stated above all priests are required to submit to a sex offender assessment conducted by the Joseph J. Peters Institute prior to their admission to the program. If the sex offender assessment indicates a high level of risk the priest is not admitted to the Prayer and Penance program.

Q: How can a victim or the public find out if a priest is in the Prayer and Penance Program?

A: Victims of sexual abuse or the general public can visit the Delegate for Investigation Web Site at <http://archphila.org/delegate>

Q: Who pays for the Prayer and Penance Program?

A: Canon Law mandates that the Archbishop of Philadelphia is responsible for the welfare of all of the Archdiocesan priests, including those in the Prayer and Penance Program. Their housing, medical treatment, sex offender treatment and monitoring services are paid by the Archdiocese.

Q: How do the priests in the Prayer and Penance support themselves?

A: Currently, each of the program participants receive a pension from their priest pension plan and/or, if they qualify, from Social Security. The current pension is \$993.00 per month.

Q: "What is the canonical penal process?"

A: Canon Law is a collection of statutes and principles that govern the internal life of the Church. This body of law concerns the sanctification of the People of God, the organizational bodies associated with the church, and the foundations of the law as it is applied, and it defines processes for the instances when the law is broken. Individual rights and duties are protected under Canon Law. Violations of the law, referred to as delicts, such as the sexual abuse of a child, are punishable under Canon Law. A canonical process may take a variety of forms including but not limited to an administrative hearing, a trial, etc. The outcomes of such a process could include laicization, which is the removal from the clerical state.