

OFFICE OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY ATTORNEY
John J. Choi, County Attorney



345 Wabasha Street, Suite 120, St. Paul, MN 55102-1432
Telephone 651-266-3222 Fax 651-266-3015

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Dennis Gerhardstein, 651 266-3074
(Cell) 651 600-1830

Historic agreement to protect children concludes with final court hearing *49 month long civil oversight leads to significant changes in Archdiocese culture*

Saint Paul, MN – The Ramsey County Attorney’s Office (RCAO) today formally concluded its four-year oversight of the civil settlement agreement (Agreement) with the Archdiocese of Saint Paul & Minneapolis (Archdiocese). The primary objective of the Agreement was to transform the organizational culture of the Archdiocese into one that is vigilant about ensuring that no child will ever again become the victim of clergy sex abuse.

“When we entered into this Agreement, we knew it was an unconventional approach to a very complex and painful legacy that took a heavy toll on countless lives over a long period of time,” said Ramsey County Attorney John Choi. “It is only through the dedication of many individuals within my office, the Court, the Archdiocese and the church community that we are here today. I want to thank my staff for their tireless efforts, Archbishop Hebda for his leadership and most of all the victims for their trust and patience that this process would yield meaningful results.”

As part of Tuesday’s final court hearing, the RCAO issued a Cultural Assessment Report evaluating the impact of the Agreement on the organizational culture of the Archdiocese. Covering the entirety of the sum parts of the Agreement and assessing the role of significant stakeholders, the [Cultural Assessment Report](#) recognizes the substantial progress made by the Archdiocese to embed this cultural shift into the daily function of the organization. The RCAO lays out numerous recommendations going forward for the Archdiocese toward the end of the report.

“While we laud the progress of the Archdiocese, we must remind everyone involved that the work to protect children is a race with no finish line,” remarked County Attorney John Choi. “Our recommendations in the Cultural Assessment Report are meant as a road map for this continuing journey.”

Civil Settlement Agreement Goals

At the outset of the criminal and civil charges on June 5, 2015, the RCAO set forth three goals:

- Hold the Archdiocese accountable for its actions (or inactions) through an admission of wrongdoing and an acknowledgement of a violation of the statute.
- Provide justice for the victims and the community.
- Instill confidence in the public that these crimes will never happen again.

Background and Timeline of Events

On November 8, 2012, (then) father Curtis Wehmeyer pled guilty in Ramsey County District Court to three felony counts of criminal sexual conduct with two minors and seventeen felony counts of possession of child pornography and was sentenced to 5 years in prison. Soon after, questions arose about whether the Archdiocese handled the knowledge of his abuse appropriately and whether any additional cases might be addressed. After determining that sufficient evidence did not exist to file charges against (then) Archbishop John Nienstedt, the RCAO launched a 20-month investigation, reviewing over 170,000 documents and interviewing over 50 witnesses which uncovered a pattern of conduct by the Archdiocese in their handling of cases involving the reported abuse of children at the hands of members of the clergy.

On June 5, 2015, the RCAO took the unprecedented step in filing both criminal and civil charges against the corporation of the Archdiocese for their failure to protect children outlining a “disturbing institutional and systemic pattern of behavior committed by the highest levels of leadership of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul & Minneapolis over the course of decades”. Further, County Attorney Choi noted the facts are “appalling” and reveal “a long history of institutional failure to prevent.....child sexual abuse by clergy.”

In late 2015, the RCAO announced a landmark civil settlement agreement (Agreement) with the Archdiocese to protect children. The three-year Agreement required an organizational structure tasked with executing the core components, including oversight by the Board of Directors, the Archbishop, Ministerial Review Board, which is comprised primarily of lay persons, as well as Director of Ministerial Standards and Safe Environment. In addition, it incorporates many of the October 2014 Child Protection protocols agreed upon by the Archdiocese and Jeff Anderson & Associates as well as the 2014 recommendations of the Safe Environment Task Force, convened to review the Archdiocese’s efforts to protect children through an examination of the efficacy of the Archdiocese Safe Environment Program and its processes relating to preventing and detecting the sexual abuse of minors.

Key measures along the way included two independent audits, restorative justice efforts and increased victim assistance measures, judicial oversight to enforce compliance on a rolling 6-month basis as well as the strengthening of Safe Environment training and reporting standards, requiring strict adherence to a policy to report any new violation that came to the attention of anyone in the Archdiocese.

Finally, on July 20, 2016, the Agreement was amended, and a final major piece fell into place with the Archdiocese, now under the leadership of Archbishop Bernard Hebda, formally admitting wrongdoing in court. This cleared the way for the dismissal of the criminal case, extended court oversight under the civil agreement, provided for one additional outside audit, and allowed the release of several key investigative files. As County Attorney Choi noted at that time: “Without such an admission by the Archdiocese, or a determination by a court, there could never be true accountability. It was not only Curtis Wehmeyer who harmed children. It was the Archdiocese as well.”

Over the next three and a half years, the Archdiocese and the RCAO met in Ramsey County District Court for seven separate 6-month reports per the Agreement as well as three independent audits as required by the civil settlement agreement.

Note: Contact Dennis Gerhardstein for additional information.