

# Bishop Accountability

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## ARCHDIOCESE OF MOBILE AL

**Credibly Accused Priests:** 13

**Accusations:** 18

**Compensation to Victims:** \$470,000

**Legal Fees, Victim Assistance and Other Expenses:** \$230,153

### 13 area priests accused since '50

Data collected as part of nationwide study by Catholic church

By Kristen Campbell  
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<http://www.al.com/news/mobileregister/index.ssf?/base/news/1077014748123301.xml>

Thirteen priests assigned to the Archdiocese of Mobile have been accused of sexual abuse of minors since 1950, the local archdiocese reported Monday in giving its first comprehensive report of such cases.

The data, collected as part of a nationwide study commissioned by U.S. bishops, represents information gathered through Dec. 31, 2003.

The statistics do not include allegations against non-clerical members of religious orders, such as Brother Nicholas Paul Bendillo, the former McGill-Toolen High School adviser recently found guilty of sex crimes against a student.

Of the 13 unidentified clergymen accused of abuse, nine are deceased, according to a report released by the archdiocese. One priest has resigned, and three others are on administrative leave and not permitted to function publicly as priests, the report noted.

Based on the number of cases already made public by the archdiocese, prosecutors, or alleged victims themselves, the data does not appear to constitute a significant increase in the number of living priests who have been accused of abuse.

Stating that "any allegation or any confirmation of abuse is awful or sinful," the Very Rev. Michael L. Farmer, chancellor of the archdiocese, said Mobile's statistics indicate that such events are "rare" here.

But Honey Weiss, the Mobile-based Southeast regional coordinator for The Linkup, a victims' advocacy group, said she believes there are more victims than the 18 noted in the report.

"We have serious reservations on these numbers and would encourage other victims to come forward," said Weiss, who herself has claimed she is a victim of clergy sexual abuse. "Let's get them counted."

Released information did not name the individuals accused of sexually abusing minors. The report, which includes information compiled by local clergy and the archdiocesan legal team, states that 84 percent of the allegations made since 1950 were received by the archdiocese last year.

Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb declined to comment on the document.

"I'm not going to expand on it," Lipscomb said.

The report also stated that insurers for the Archdiocese of Mobile have paid \$470,000 in compensation to victims of sexual abuse since 1950, and an additional \$230,153 has been paid for legal fees, victim assistance and other expenses associated with clergy sexual abuse claims during the last 53 years.

In the recent criminal case against Bendillo -- better known to many as "Brother Vic" -- two witnesses testified that together they received \$200,000 to settle a civil suit. The Archdiocese of Mobile and the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, the religious order with which Bendillo is affiliated, were also named as defendants in the civil suit.

Farmer said Monday that he could not confirm whether the sum from that case was included in the reported compensation figure.

While the national scandal of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church began making headlines in 2002, the crisis hit Mobile last year.

On March 16, 2003, Lipscomb announced to parishioners at St. Peter's Catholic Church in Montgomery that longtime Mobile priest the Rev. J. Alexander Sherlock had admitted to sexually abusing three minors in the past. Sherlock resigned from the priesthood Feb. 28, 2003, one day before new church policy would have required Lipscomb to remove him.

Mobile County District Attorney John M. Tyson Jr. opened a criminal investigation into Sherlock last March, and soon announced investigations into other men connected to the archdiocese, including Bendillo, the Rev. Barry Ryan, the Rev. E. Eugene Smith and the Rev. Arthur C. Schrenger. Last year, two women came forward to the Mobile Register to accuse the Rev. Patrick L. Nicholson of sexual misconduct; one said she was 15 years old when Nicholson repeatedly tried to molest her.

Schrenger was dismissed from all priestly and public ministerial duties in 2003; last year, Lipscomb told the Register that Nicholson isn't allowed to work as a priest. According to the Official Catholic Directory, Smith was on leave from the archdiocese between 1985 and 2002; more recent information about the priest was not available.

Ryan, who was accused of sexual misconduct while serving as a chaplain in the Montgomery area in the 1990s, is assigned to the Diocese of Brooklyn. He recently entered therapy after a new accusation surfaced, a New York church official reported in December 2003.

Earlier this month, a Mobile jury found Bendillo guilty of sex crimes against a former student, Clark Glenn Jr. The 75-year-old now faces up to five years in prison for enticing a child for immoral purposes and as much as an additional 12 months for second-degree sex abuse; he also is looking at four additional criminal trials on sex-related charges.

While the archdiocesan report stated that 18 individuals have made allegations of sexual abuse to the church body, Glenn said he knows of victims who have not come forward to any public agency or the church.

"There's so many various levels of shame that people I guess bury their hearts under. It happens for so long that it's a really long journey toward the light," he said. "A lot of people would never trust the Catholic Church to deal with that stuff."

According to the archdiocese, 50 percent of the alleged incidents of sexual abuse of minors took place in the 1970s. The report states that 11.2 percent of the alleged abuse occurred in the 1950s, 22.2 percent in the 1960s and 16.6 percent in the 1980s. No reports were made of abuse by a priest in the 1990s, according to the archdiocese.

Farmer said most of the allegations of sexual abuse came from adults who said they were abused as children.

While the assigned research did not include allegations against members of non-clerical religious orders, such as brothers and nuns, the local report noted that the archdiocese had received complaints about "one member of a non-clerical religious order."

Farmer confirmed that the "member" was Bendillo.

The data collected in Mobile and other dioceses across the country was gathered for a survey by the New York-based John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The national report, which will not detail statistics diocese by diocese, is scheduled for release by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Feb. 27.

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