

Fr. Eric Hill, Pastor, responds to questions from Prince of Peace parishioners on May 15, 2019 on night 2 of "Conversations with Fr. Eric". This event, hosted by our Pastoral Response Team, is to allow space to grow in understanding, promote healing and hope regarding accusations of Clergy Abuse impacting the greater Catholic Church. More details of how Prince of Peace is responding to the needs of their faith community can be found at popfb.org/pastoralresponse.

What happens in the confessional when someone confesses the sin of abuse (or any sin)?

The Seal of the confessional is just that a seal. We, as priests, cannot break that seal under any circumstance. In the confessional, the priest would encourage the person to do what is right. No sin is unforgivable. Pope Francis speaks about the Seal of Confession in a recent [Vatican News article](#).

Have there been priests wrongfully accused?

Yes, I am sure there have been. There are usually returned to ministry. This is after all of the investigation is complete and the person has been cleared.

What have been the consequences of priests (bishops) who have committed such crimes?

For many, they are already dead. [The list from the Archdiocese is listed on their website and ours as well.](#) There are priests in jail but that all depends on each jurisdiction and whether or not they prosecute the offenders according to the laws at the time. I do think that priests who committed such acts of abuse should be removed from ministry. Some have asked why the list is "short". I can only assume that the list contains the credibly accused. If there are others not listed, they have probably been cleared. [If the investigation shows the priest to be guilty then he is removed from the clerical state in due process according to Canon Law.](#) Also the fact that our diocese is "young" (est. 1962) as we were separated from the diocese of Savannah.

May 7th the Pope issued a "[Molto Proprio](#)" regarding the rules and regulations for reporting and handling of bishops accused of such crimes.

If there is an allegation, we immediately report to the local law enforcement authorities.

How is the Archdiocese of Atlanta cooperating with the investigation?

I believe that the Archdiocese is fully opening up the records that we possess. I have no idea what will be revealed until the [investigation](#) is complete. And we, as an Archdiocese asked for this review to occur. I am not sure if other pastors are addressing these issues in their parishes. I have only one parish to run but I have not heard of any other parishes in the Archdiocese who are handling the impact of the Clergy Abuse Scandal on their communities of faith.

What are seminarians allowed to do during formation?

Seminarians are called to live a chaste life. We send our seminarians to established seminaries in other parts of the country because we do not have one here in Georgia. The number of ordinations is increasing but the increasing need is not keeping up with the demand/need for priests in active ministry. [Here is the Formation for Priesthood](#) as laid out by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Why can't priests be married?

Long historical and theological answer. However, marriage is not the issue, chastity is not the issue. There are single people who do not abuse and there are married people who do. Here are is the [Canon Law](#) that supports this information. There are different rites of the Catholic Church, here is an [EWTN article](#) that explains former Anglican pastors (married) who become Catholic priests.

Does the church provide help to priests who abuse?

All priests that are accused undergo psychological treatment. The length of time depends on the situation. This is also after the authorities have fully investigated and gone through their steps legally.

What happens when we have fond memories of priests who were later accused of a crime/sin?

I understand the difficulty because many priests fell into sin and then repented and recovered and some have been falsely accused over the years and their reputation is forever tarnished. Also, not every priest accused is guilty. We have to pray for them all.

Are there a lot of people at Prince of Peace who have been abused?

I have no idea of the number of abused here in the parish. But we should always remember that abuse is much more than just sexual. It's physical, emotional, psychological, etc.

What is the plan for reporting here at Prince of Peace?

We have always had procedures which are posted in all of the rooms of the building. We also have the contact information in the bulletin for reporting and on our website. [Here is a website with these details.](#)

What is the protection for our children in preschool?

The doors are locked and access is completely restricted to the preschool area. The teachers are present when the kids are on the playground.

How are the abused treated by the Church?

We offer assistance and counseling, more about Victim Assistance this on the [Archdiocese website.](#)

What does one do when confronted with abuse? Shared by another?

[We should report it.](#) Sometimes the abused is unable to leave the situation for various reasons.

Please be careful of the media that we are using to inform ourselves.

There are many extreme media outlets on both ends of the extremes that are not there to heal and inform but rather to incite anger.