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Archbishop Joseph Kurtz says his administration follows nationwide standards for reporting abuse allegations to police. MICHAEL CLEVELAND/COURIER JOURNAL

Catholic

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Kurtz came in as a warm and inviting man with a remarkable ability to remember everyone's name. It was hoped he would help heal wounds in the archdiocese. Abuse survivor Cal Pfeiffer recalls thinking the new archbishop was either incredibly nice or just a great politician.

A decade later, some abuse survivors say they know within it all. "He's disingenuous when he says how sorry he is. He has ... all these empathy words. And he has this big smile on his face," said Frank Diebold, 70. "But what has he done to make survivors feel better? I don't know of one damn thing."

A growing chorus of critics now demands change, empowered by a recent grand jury report revealing widespread child abuse within Pennsylvania Catholic dioceses.

The Louisville chapter of the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP), led by Pfeiffer, staged a protest in September and urged Kurtz to fire employees who knew of cover-ups, to improve survivor outreach and to boost transparency.

The pressure is unlikely to ease. The Kentucky attorney general wants legislative approval for a grand jury much like the one in Pennsylvania. At least 60 people, including Bishops Catholics, are organizing to lobby for it.

Kurtz responded to the Pennsylvania report by publicly grieving for survivors. He led a prayer service for victims and in the Catholic Record promised to "act decisively" on their behalf.

"It's a need for us as a community to always repair and renew ourselves," Kurtz told the Courier-Journal. "The Church of Jesus Christ is one that requires us to seek to protect one another and that is my intent."

But people haunted by childhood abuse say Kurtz's public sympathy does nothing to heal their wounds or restore confidence in their church. "People want to see something done. I'd like to see Kurtz turn the kitchen table upside down and start throwing the glasses," said Diebold, who was abused by a Louisville priest at about age 10.

"Instead he says, 'Everything's fine. I'm sorry, guys. Everything will be all right.'"

A history of abuse
Louisville was one of many communities rocked in 2002 by revelations that Catholic Church leaders commonly shifted pedophile priests between assignments to help cover up their crimes. The 2003 lawsuit settlement ousted dozens of predator priests, deacons and church workers.

The late Archbishop Thomas Kelly

publicly apologized, changed policies and removed abusive priests. He held a healing service in 2004, sprinkling holy water on doorways of buildings where the Rev. Louis Miller had abused children.

but even he lamented that it seemed ineffective.

"I could have got down on my hands and knees and scrubbed and scrubbed, but the memory, the stain of what happened here, would never be washed away," said Kelly, who died in 2001.

Kurtz says his administration follows nationwide standards for reporting abuse allegations to police, cooperates with investigations, trains employees and volunteers and offers victim counseling.

He retained Chancellor and Chief Administrative Officer Brian Reynolds, who in the Kelly era helped negotiate settlements that kept cases of abuse from going public.

Kurtz allowed a priest under investigation for abusing a child to live in a church rectory.

He supported a Vatican decision to make the Most Rev. William Medley Bishop of Owensboro over the objections of abuse survivors who say he participated in Kelly's cover-ups.

And Kurtz hasn't always listened to abuse survivors, Pfeiffer said.

In an email to the Courier-Journal, Kurtz wrote that he agrees with those who say the church needs to squarely face the truth about sexual abuse.

"Silence is not the answer," he wrote. "There may have been judgment calls made over the years that individuals disagree with, and I respect their right to disagree."

Kurtz's administration recently promised to seek advice from survivors but hasn't increased accountability.

Unless the persons responsible for this hideous culture of hiding priests and protecting them are removed from the positions of power, the culture is still going to remain as an intrusive ghost that reverts back to its old ways," said William McMurry, a lawyer who represented hundreds of local abuse victims.

"I thought Brian Reynolds would be the first person to go."

Troubled legacy
The Pennsylvania grand jury report hit home for Kurtz, who served in the Allentown Diocese for 27 years. He has said he was unaware of the allegations covered in the report, which doesn't implicate him in any way.

He's called it "a troubling indictment that church leadership, called to holiness and charity, did not provide an example for all of society in dealing with these issues."

Kurtz's response to the report included an Oct. 5 special service at Holy Family Church in Camp Taylor that began

About the Courier Journal's report



This report was prepared using legal depositions and other documents from multiple lawsuits, as well as criminal records and news archives. Reporter Caitlin McGlade also interviewed Catholic church leaders in Louisville and Owensboro, as well as abuse survivors, activists, attorneys and lifelong Catholics.

Caitlin McGlade is a member of the Courier-Journal's investigative team. The Dayton, Ohio, native is a 2011 graduate of Ohio University.

Before joining the Courier-Journal in 2017, McGlade covered one of the nation's largest school districts for the South Florida Sun-Sentinel and investigated school bus safety, water quality problems and public health issues for the Arizona Republic. Her work has been recognized by the Arizona Press Club and the Ohio Society of Professional Journalists.

Her previous work in Louisville includes an in-depth investigation of danger related to 11-passenger vans commonly used by churches.

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with a hymn. "In a time of pain," "Come seize us as you seized your Son from corruption's devilish toll," about 100 choraleons sang. "May we rise at last from our shadowed past with your love as our guide and goal."

Brian Reynolds was there, several rows behind Cal Pfeiffer.

Reynolds has held top positions in the archdiocese since 1990. In lawsuit depositions in 2002, he acknowledged he helped arrange payments to victims, with conditions attached.

In 1995 he helped arrange payment for counseling and medical care for Robert Mattingly, a former altar boy repeatedly abused by the Rev. Arthur Wood. The \$50,500 came with strings — keep it secret and promise not to sue.

"Since Father Wood was already deceased, it was about developing confidentiality just to support the privacy of individuals involved, either the person, Mr. Mattingly, or the archdiocese," Reynolds said in a deposition.

McMurry, the victims' lawyer, questioned the offer.

"Well, it's usual and customary and had been used as a tool to avoid scandal; isn't that true?" McMurry asked.

"... I don't know what the particular motivation was," Reynolds responded.

Mattingly, who died in 2008, later joined the survivor's lawsuit after learning church staff Irene Wood had abused others but kept quiet.

In a recent interview, Reynolds said it's wrong to assume the church forced a confidential settlement on Mattingly, but would not elaborate.

Though confidential settlements are widely criticized, Reynolds said victims

sometimes wanted them, and the archdiocese never tried to take back money if a victim went public.

Reynolds also helped develop a non-discredited policy that allowed abusive priests to remain in restricted ministry while other employees were fired for the same offenses. The policy, in place from 1993 to 2002, stated a possible legal obligation to promptly report child abuse but also declared that, "No action or investigation of any nature should be initiated at the local level without the explicit authorization of the Archbishop." Complaints remained in-house unless a committee decided to call police.

Reynolds said he had nothing to do with priest assignments. While he helped develop the policy, he was not responsible for implementing it.

"It was insufficient policy," Reynolds said. "I didn't make it up, I can't say, 'Hey this is a good idea. That's not what we did. We collected the names around the country and wrote them in our version.'"

Reynolds in a deposition said Kelly asked him to help draft the policy without telling him about abusive priests. He acknowledged knowing of an abuse allegation against Miller in 1995, but he said he had no information about the case and only helped calculate victim counseling costs.

Miller remained in ministry for seven more years, ultimately was named in 70 lawsuits by abuse victims and was sent to prison.

Kurtz won't gain survivors' trust as long as Reynolds remains at his side, said Michael Diebold, Frank's brother.

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