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Chaput removes two, returns four priests to ministry

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Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput has made decisions on 14 of the 26 priests accused of sexual abuse or improper behavior suspended in the wake of the 2011 grand jury report. (CNS photo/Bob Roller)

Two more priests suspended after the release of a 2011 grand jury report will be removed from public ministry in the Philadelphia archdiocese, Archbishop Charles Chaput announced late Friday morning.

The priests removed from ministry, Fr. John Bowe, 64, and Fr. David Givey, 68, were found to have violated the archdiocese?s Standards of Ministerial Behavior and Boundaries [1]. Both can appeal the decision to the Vatican.

Previously, Chaput had indicated priests found unfit for ministry could face laicization, life under supervision or a life of prayer and penance.

Kenneth Gavin, associate director of communications for the archdiocese, told *NCR* that generally speaking, laicization is usually pursued when sexual abuse of a minor occurs. Neither Bowe nor Givey were alleged to have sexually abuse a minor.

In addition, Chaput said that four priests were found suitable for ministry. They are Fr. Paul Castellani, 53, Msgr. John Close, 68, Fr. Steven Harris, 57, and Fr. Leonard Peterson, 70.

Gavin said the purpose of Friday?s announcement was to clarify the status of the six priests as suitable or unsuitable for ministry, and additional details concerning their futures were not available at this time.

?It?s way too early to say certain disciplinary action in individual cases [of unsuitable for ministry priests], or for those who have been found suitable for ministry, to be saying whether or not they?re going back into a parish, what parish they might go to. None of that is happening right now,? he said.

This morning?s announcement leaves 11 pending cases among the 26 priests suspended by then-archbishop Cardinal Justin Rigali in the wake of the Philadelphia District Attorney?s 2011 grand jury report [2] on the archdiocese?s handling of priest sex abuse allegations. That report stated that 37 active archdiocesan priests had allegations of inappropriate behavior or sexual abuse of minors.

Chaput announced May 4 resolutions in eight of the cases, removing five priests from ministry and returning three [3]. One of the suspended priests died before a conclusion could be reached in his case.

In a press release Friday, Chaput expressed gratitude for the work of two groups in the investigation, the Multi-Disciplinary Team headed by veteran child abuse prosecutor Gina Maisto Smith and the Archdiocesan Review Board.

?The experience of these doctors, police officers, former prosecutors, victims' advocates and others in dealing with the broad societal problem of sexual abuse was crucial to our work,? the archbishop said.

The 2011 grand jury report recommended charges against Msgr. William J. Lynn, Fr. James J. Brennan, former priest Edward Avery, Fr. Charles Engelhardt and schoolteacher Bernard Shero.

Lynn and Brennan stood as codefendants for more than two months in a trial where a jury found Lynn guilty of child endangerment [4], but could not come to a conclusion on rape and child endangerment charges against Brennan.

Before the trail began, Avery, expected to be a third codefendant, pleaded guilty to conspiracy and sexual assault of a 10-year-old boy. Engelhardt and Shero await their Sept. 4 court dates.

The six cases announced this morning followed the same path as the previous eight. First submitted to the appropriate district attorney?s office, each case, if cleared, then passed to investigation under the archdiocese?s Multi-Disciplinary Team. The results of each investigation (in total included 400,000-plus documents and nearly 230 interviews) then moved to the Archdiocesan Review Board before Chaput issued his final decision.

Barbara Dorris, outreach director for the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, expressed skepticism in the process, saying ?it's very hard to have any faith whatsoever in secretive internal church procedures run by a few Catholics hand-picked by complicit church officials.?

She urged the archdiocese to announce decisions on alleged priests as soon as possible.

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