

Francis' Argentina abuse record questioned

Brian Roewe Joshua J. McElwee | Mar. 12, 2014 NCR Today

A U.S.-based group that operates a clergy sex abuse database has accused Pope Francis of remaining silent on clergy sex abuse during his time as archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The group BishopAccountability.org [published Wednesday morning](#) [1] what it has called the first comprehensive analysis of Francis' abuse track record while he was Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio. The documents span the 15 years (1998-2013) he served as the head of the Buenos Aires church, as well as his time as president of the Argentine Episcopal Conference (2005-2011) and includes information on 42 accused Argentine clerics.

Anne Barrett Doyle, co-director of BishopAccountability.org, said during his first year as pope, Francis has repeatedly attacked corruption in the church's finances but has "basically ignored" the abuse scandal.

"Does Francis have the will to resolve this catastrophic problem?" Doyle said in a press release, pointing to Francis' [March 5 comments](#) [2] to an Italian newspaper that the church "is the only one to be attacked" despite the prevalence of child sexual abuse in other institutions.

"Studying his record as archbishop will help us better understand his underlying approach," she said.

The documents' release comes just one day before the one-year anniversary of the start of Francis' pontificate. In the last week, critics have begun to raise further questions of his response to clergy sex abuse after the comments he made last week.

"The statistics of the phenomenon of violence against children are staggering, but show clearly that the vast majority of abuse happens in the family setting and neighborhood," Francis said in the interview.

"The Catholic church is maybe the only public institution to have moved with transparency and responsibility," he said. "No one else has done more. Yet the church is the only one to be attacked."

The timeframe of the documents coincides with a period when clergy sex abuse crises raged in other parts of the world. For the most part, it shows a mostly silent Argentine church, BishopAccountability.org said.

"[Bergoglio] released no documents, no names of accused priests, no tallies of accused priests, no policy for handling abuse, not even an apology to victims," BishopAccountability.org said on its website.

The group said four victims of four known offenders sought Bergoglio's assistance but received none. That includes the parents of five girls allegedly sexually assaulted by a pastor in a neighboring diocese's community soup kitchen, 25 miles from the Buenos Aires archdiocese.

The documents highlight the pope's role in five abuse cases and alleges that in four of them, he either "knowingly or unwittingly" slowed victims in pursuing their alleged abusers. The profiled priests are Fr. Julio César Grassi, Fr. Rubén Pardo, Marianist Br. Fernando Enrique Picciochi, Fr. Mario Napoleon Sasso, and Fr.

Carlos Maria Gauna.

In the case of Grassi, BishopAccountability.org said the documents show Bergoglio commissioned a secret study to persuade Argentine Supreme Court justices that the priest was innocent, despite a 2009 conviction of molesting a boy.

The research group provides links to Argentine news accounts referring to the so-called secret report by Bergoglio, but not to the alleged report itself.*

Additionally, only one of the five priests detailed in the research group's reporting -- Guana -- was a priest of Bergoglio's Buenos Aires archdiocese. The other four priests were members of other Argentine dioceses and Bergoglio would thus not have been their supervisor.

Bergoglio's apparent silence echoes a larger pattern in the South American coastal country, BishopAccountability.org said, calling Argentine bishops "among the least transparent in the worldwide church." It said the Argentine bishops' conference has yet to publish its abuse-response policy, which was due in Rome in May 2012, and questioned their reported cases of alleged abusers.

[Brian Roewe is an *NCR* staff writer. Follow him on Twitter: [@BrianRoewe](#) [3].]

**This paragraph was changed to note links to the news reports.*

Source URL (retrieved on 06/23/2017 - 02:02): <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/francis-argentina-abuse-record-questioned>

Links:

[1] <http://www.bishop-accountability.org/Argentina/>

[2] <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/francis-marks-anniversary-interview-family-women-contraception>

[3] <http://www.twitter.com/brianroewe>