



New York Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan gestures as he brings the 77th annual Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner to a close at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City Oct. 20, 2022. Dolan turns 75 in February 2025. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)

Nate Tinner-Williams

[View Author Profile](#)

Black Catholic Messenger

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

New York — November 18, 2024

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

New administrative cuts in the Archdiocese of New York, stemming from sex abuse payouts dating back decades, include the closure of its Office of Black Ministry (OBM), multiple sources have confirmed.

Cardinal [Timothy Dolan](#), who has served as archbishop since 2009, published a letter on Nov. 8 noting that the archdiocese has begun a "restructuring of its pastoral offices."

"[This] has, unfortunately, resulted in regrettable lay-offs for some workers at the Cardinal Cooke Building of the Catholic Center and elsewhere around the archdiocese... I am grateful for the service of all those whose positions are being eliminated."

The affected pastoral offices were unspecified in Dolan's letter, which was sent out via Flocknote and has not been released to the general public. A source in the archdiocese, however, noted that the OBM is among them, though few details have been provided.

Read full document:

Document

[Dolan letter.pdf](#)

The fate of two initiatives connected to that office, the sainthood guild of Venerable [Pierre Toussaint](#) and the [Pierre Toussaint Scholarship](#) program, is also unclear. The latter held its annual fundraising gala on Nov. 4 in Manhattan, with more than 300 in attendance—including Dolan, who praised the program's work. OBM staff were reportedly informed of the layoffs the next day.

Neither the OBM director, Br Tyrone Davis of the Christian Brothers, nor the archdiocese responded to requests for comment from Black Catholic Messenger.

"The restructuring is not a one-time event," said Dolan in his letter.

"As with our parish planning, in order for us to be good stewards and administrators, we need to continually evaluate how we are operating and asking if there is a better way forward."

The cardinal, who is due to submit his age-mandated retirement request in February, has generated controversy concerning the OBM in recent years, including his response to its Black History Month Mass in 2021.

The homilist, a Black Jesuit priest named Greg Chisholm—then the pastor of [St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church](#) in Harlem—stirred the crowd with an explication of Black struggle and overcoming White racism, but was suddenly relieved of his pastoral duties less than six months later. It is believed that this was due to a negative reaction to his remarks from the chancery.

Following this month's letter, the OBM's annual Black Catholic History Month Mass, which was due to take place on Nov. 23 at [St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church](#) in the Bronx, was abruptly canceled on Saturday—just ten days after being announced.



The logo of the Archdiocese of New York's now defunct Office of Black Ministry.
(Office of Black Ministry/Pierre Toussaint Guild - Archdiocese of New York/Facebook)

The closure of the OBM comes amid a growing total of monetary payouts for child sex abuse in the archdiocese, whose territory includes Manhattan, the Bronx, Staten Island, and several border counties of New York City proper.

In 2019, the archdiocese's Independent Reconciliation Compensation Program was noted to have paid out more than \$65 million to more than 320 victims. That August brought the enactment of the New York Child Victims Act, which vacated the statute of limitations on civil lawsuits for child sex abuse and has led to the bankruptcy of several Catholic dioceses in the state.

Though not yet insolvent, the Archdiocese of New York has faced increasingly evident financial tolls on its ministry, with recent Catholic school closures, the shutdown of the Catholic New York newspaper in 2023, and the sale of the longtime chancery headquarters the same year.

Dueling lawsuits in the past 18 months between the archdiocese and its insurer, Chubb Ltd., concern the firm's liability for more than 1,400 active child sex abuse claims—roughly half of the total filed against the archdiocese since 2019. Should the firm succeed in court, the archdiocese may be forced to file for Chapter 7 liquidation.

Advertisement

"In the long run, all these cases are a towering expense for us," Dolan said in [a separate letter](#) to the faithful in September.

The cardinal said that the closure of the OBM, founded in 1976, and other archdiocesan offices does not constitute a break in commitment to the diverse communities of his flock, but rather a shift to local and parish ministries. This, he claimed, is the preference of New York Catholic clergy and is inspired by the Vatican.

"[It] puts us in line with the notion of synodality [sic], so eloquently expressed by our Holy Father, Pope Francis, that the Church should not operate 'top-down' but instead be 'bottom-up' listening to the voice of the people of God," wrote Dolan.

"One way that we will accomplish this, for instance, is by appointing priest chaplains for the various ethnic communities that make up the archdiocese, including the different African, Asian, Hispanic and Latino communities, who will be responsible for organizing special Masses and celebrations, and responding to each community's

unique pastoral needs."