

What the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report Mischaracterized and Omitted About Cardinal Wuerl's Record as Bishop of Pittsburgh

Claims made in the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report inaccurately portray or distort the facts of Cardinal Wuerl's 18-year tenure as Bishop of Pittsburgh from 1988 to 2006. This is in part due to a process that did not allow for submission of evidence that would disprove the claims made in the report. This document corrects the record on the report's three core inaccurate claims:

Claim: Then-Bishop Wuerl “approved transfers for priests instead of removing them from ministry” after child abuse claims were made.

Facts: Cardinal Wuerl confronted allegations against 32 priests who had claims of child sexual abuse against them.

- 18 priests were removed from ministry.
- 13 priests were either dead or removed from ministry when Bishop Wuerl arrived in 1988.
- 1 priest was returned to ministry after the anonymous, nonphysical claim against him was deemed not credible.
- There was never a policy or process to transfer priests with claims against them.
 - Cardinal Wuerl challenged a Vatican court, which ordered a priest accused of abusing children (Cipolla) returned to ministry, and denied requests by removed priests to return to ministry.

Every priest with a credible and substantiated accusation was removed from ministry.

Claim: Then-Bishop Wuerl “concealed information” on child sex abuse claims against priests.

Facts: The report cites a priest “sex ring” to prove this claim, yet fails to report the following:

- In 1987 all three priests charged in this abhorrent case were out of ministry and criminally investigated – a year before Bishop Wuerl came to Pittsburgh.
- Two were convicted and sent to prison.
- Cardinal Wuerl never allowed the three to return to public ministry.
- The local Pittsburgh press covered it extensively and it was a matter of public record.

Then-Bishop Wuerl dealt with claims transparently.

Claim: Bishop Wuerl “oversaw inadequate church investigations” of claims of abuse.

Facts: Bishop Wuerl and the Diocese of Pittsburgh investigated claims and put in place policies and processes to remove priests from ministry and protect young people.

- 18 priests removed from ministry.
- Established a child protection review board in 1988 to review all claims of abuse.
- Created a survivor advocate position in 1993 to assist survivors.
- Collaborated with law enforcement and other professionals on increasingly enhanced child protection policies, including investigations of claims.
 - “[Wuerl] changed the system. He was the first person in the United States, Pittsburgh Diocese, to take on the idea that pedophiles ... have to be rooted out and fired,” said Bob Colville, former Allegheny County District Attorney. “[I]f they were involved with a minor, they would be involved with the district attorney.” *KDKA, August 15, 2018*
 - In 2002, the Rev. Thomas Reese, SJ, an expert on the Church in the America, noted, “Wuerl was clearly ahead of the curve” on child protection efforts.” In 2003 the *Boston Globe* noted then-Bishop Wuerl’s “strong record on outing sexually abusive priests.”

The facts show diligence in addressing claims and protecting children from abuse.

When all of the facts in the report – and those omitted – are sorted out, it is evident that then-Bishop Wuerl acted with diligence, with concern for the survivors, removed offending priests and took clear steps to prevent future acts of abuse.