



## News

# Grand Jury report brings indictments

By Matthew Gambino • Posted February 10, 2011

In a reprise of 2005's sensational grand jury report of sexual assaults by clergy in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Philadelphia District Attorney Seth Williams released a new report by a grand jury investigating similar abuse during a press conference at his office Feb 10.

While the 2005 report detailed dozens of cases of sexual abuse of children by clergy over many decades, the new report brings criminal indictments for the first time.

Charged with rape, assault and other felonies related to minors, as recommended by the grand jury, are former archdiocesan priest Edward V. Avery, 68, of Haverford; Father Charles Engelhardt, 64, of Wyndmoor and a priest Oblate of St. Francis de Sales; an archdiocesan priest, Father James J. Brennan, 47, of Linfield; and former lay teacher, Bernard Shero, 48, of Bristol. All have either been formally processed on the charges or will be by the end of Thursday, Feb. 10, according to Williams.

Msgr. William J. Lynn, 60, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Downingtown, was to be formally charged on two counts of endangering the welfare of a child. The charges stem, according to the report, from Msgr. Lynn's conduct as archdiocesan secretary for clergy from 1992 to 2004. In that role, he was responsible for recommending the assignment of priests in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

He is believed to be the only high ranking diocesan official indicted under a criminal statute in the United States for charges related to the sexual abuse scandal that came to light in 2002.

Due to the volume of evidence collected by the grand jury, which includes testimony of some 45 witnesses, Williams said a preliminary hearing for the charges will be waived. No trial date has been set.

Cardinal Justin Rigali released a statement Feb. 10 saying that while he and archdiocesan officials had not yet reviewed the report entirely, they would "consider carefully and take very seriously any observations and recommendations of this grand jury."

"I also welcome the opportunity for ongoing collaboration with the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office in the vital work of protecting children," the Cardinal said.

At the press conference District Attorney Williams admitted that as a practicing Catholic, presenting the grand jury's findings caused him discomfort.

“This isn’t a witch hunt into the Catholic Church,” said Williams, a member of St. Cyprian Parish in West Philadelphia. “The criminal acts that occurred here are not representative of my religion. They are the bad acts of individual men.

“I recognize all the good that the Roman Catholic Church has done and continues to do in the world. But I am sworn to uphold the law, and I will do what is necessary to protect children.”

The grand jury’s charges stem from cases in recent years. The report alleges Avery joined Shero and Father Engelhardt in the abuse of a 10-year-old boy from approximately 1998 to 2000 at St. Jerome Parish in Philadelphia. According to archdiocesan records, an allegation was received concerning Father Engelhardt in 2009 and reported it to the Philadelphia district attorney. His ministry was restricted Feb. 10, 2011.

The Archdiocese received a report concerning then-Father Avery that alleged he had inappropriate contact with a minor as far back as 1992. It limited his ministry to chaplain at Nazareth Hospital in Philadelphia from 1993 to 2003. After the Archdiocese substantiated allegations of sexual abuse against him and removed him from ministry in 2003, he was laicized in 2006.

New allegations against him were received in 2007 and 2009, which were forwarded to the district attorneys of Delaware County and Philadelphia, respectively.

The charges against Father Brennan, who has been prohibited from performing the duties of a priest or presenting himself as a priest since 2006, stem from an allegation of abuse concerning a 14-year-old boy in 1996, according to the report. The allegation was received by the Archdiocese in 2006 and reported to the DA’s office.

Williams noted that since the 2005 grand jury report, positive changes have resulted in the Archdiocese’s procedures for handling allegations of abuse and its impact upon victims.

“Victims are receiving counseling and support, and the Church is reporting some abusers to law enforcement, something that never happened in the past,” he said. “This investigation, in fact, began as a result of reports received from the Archdiocese.”

Williams commended the Archdiocese for these improvements, but emphasized more needs to be done regarding concerns of victims’ confidentiality and the nature of abuse allegations against priests.

The statement on the Archdiocese’s web site, [archphila.org](http://archphila.org), was joined by a document titled “Creating a Network of Protection and Prevention.” It describes the Archdiocese’s efforts to assist victims of sexual abuse and to prevent abuse and protect children through Church-sponsored training programs for adults and young people.

The Cardinal pledged the Catholic community will “do everything possible to rectify the injustices suffered by victims.”

“Victims of sexual abuse by clergy may find this news deeply painful,” he said. “It is in this spirit that the Archdiocese of Philadelphia is cooperating fully with the civil authorities in this and all related matters.”

Auxiliary Bishop Daniel Thomas, who also had not yet read the grand jury’s report, urged trust in the ministry of Jesus for “healing of the body, mind, spirit and soul.”

“We trust in His healing love, compassion, grace and peace,” Bishop Thomas said.

A video message of Cardinal Rigali concerning the grand jury report is posted to [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) in English and Spanish.

Other documents reacting to the report also in English and Spanish are posted to the Archdiocese’s web site, [archphila.org](https://www.archphila.org).

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