

Judgment Day Is Approaching for Archdiocese's Facilitators & Enablers

**By Sister Maureen, Paul Turlish
Philadelphia Inquirer
February 9, 2012**

<http://www.philly.com/philly/opinion/138977774.html>

FOR THE first time in this country, a high-ranking clergyman - Msgr. William Lynn, the former vicar of clergy for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia - will be tried on criminal charges for putting children in danger because of his "alleged" mishandling of priests known or credibly accused of the sexual exploitation of children.

No bishop or high-ranking church official in the United States has ever been held criminally responsible for facilitating or enabling the sexual exploitation of a child, but that is about to change with the March opening of Lynn's criminal trial.

It remains to be seen, however, what effect Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua's death will have on the admissibility of information contained in testimony videotaped in preparation for the trial.

Testimony from Bevilacqua's 10 grand jury appearances relating to the sexual abuse of children and the subsequent cover-up continue to be under seal.

What church officials in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia have done and what they have failed to do over decades has enabled and facilitated the sexual exploitation of untold numbers of children, and that is only the beginning of the harm inflicted on the innocent.

Remember, this is the archdiocese that has vehemently denied that it even had a problem with priests sexually exploiting children within its ranks when the magnitude of the sexual abuse and cover-up in the Archdiocese of Boston was exposed by the Boston Globe.

Nor has the Archdiocese of Philadelphia been able to get out in front of its sexual-abuse cover-up scandal: not between 2002 and 2005, when it denied that it had any problems at all; not in 2005, when the first Philadelphia grand jury report came out and it took 76 pages for Stradley, Ronon, Stevens & Young, L.L.P., to help the Archdiocese put its foot in its mouth while confirming what many had suspected for years; and not in 2011, when

the second grand jury report documented how little had been done in response to the recommendations made in the 2005 report.

On Jan. 26, Judge M. Teresa Sarmina told the Archdiocese "to be ready March 26, the first day of Lynn's conspiracy and child-endangerment trial, to turn over what could be hundreds or thousands of private records detailing Lynn's communications with church lawyers about sex-abuse claims between 1992 and 2004, when he was secretary for clergy."

The possible exposure of the depth and breadth of the hierarchy's cover-up of the sexual abuse of children in the Archdiocese may very well eclipse that of the Boston Archdiocese in 2002.

Should Sarmina, on making her decision, have immediately sent officers of the court armed with search warrants and security personnel to the offices of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to secure all related records?

Documents have been destroyed while some have gone missing in other dioceses in this country. The possibility that it could happen here cannot be ruled out.

Should those who have failed so miserably and learned so little since 2002 now be trusted to do the right thing and follow Sarmina's orders?

Remember, altruism was never the basis for the decisions made by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2002.

Shielding those who commit the heinous crime of sexually exploiting children, who enable others to do so and then who are complicit in covering up such "prior bad acts" is a matter for the criminal-justice system because it is society's responsibility to protect those who could not protect themselves.

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