

THOMAS J. DONOVAN, JR.
ATTORNEY GENERAL

JOSHUA R. DIAMOND
DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL

SARAH E.B. LONDON
CHIEF ASST. ATTORNEY GENERAL



TEL: (802) 828-3171

<http://www.ago.vermont.gov>

STATE OF VERMONT
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
109 STATE STREET
MONTPELIER, VT
05609-1001

August 22, 2019

Update from the Attorney General's Office on Behalf of the St. Joseph's Orphanage Task Force

Who makes up the Task Force reviewing the allegations of murder, abuse, and sexual abuse at St. Joseph's Orphanage?

The joint Task Force consists of the Vermont Attorney General's Office, the Burlington Police Department, the Vermont State Police, the Mayor of Burlington and the Chittenden County State's Attorney's Office. The Burlington Police Department and Vermont Attorney General's Office serve as Co-Chairs of the Task Force.

When was the Task Force formed?

The Task Force was formed in September 2018 following a grand jury report on priest abuse in Pennsylvania, released August 14, 2018, and the BuzzFeed News article, dated August 27, 2018, "[We Saw Nuns Kill Children: The Ghosts of St. Joseph's Catholic Orphanage.](#)"

What is the mandate of the Task Force?

The focus of the Task Force is to investigate reports of murder, abuse, and sexual abuse at St. Joseph's Orphanage in Burlington, Vermont. The Task Force is also reviewing reports of alleged abuse committed by priests or others affiliated with The Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington and occurring in Vermont. The goals of the Task Force are:

1. To identify and prosecute any crimes that are provable and still within the statutes of limitations;
2. To review the role of the Catholic Diocese, Vermont Catholic Charities, the Sisters of Providence and any other entities familiar with the alleged crimes; and

3. To develop and facilitate a restorative inquiry for victims, family members, affected individuals, and communities.

Since the launch of the Task Force in September 2018, what steps has the Task Force taken to fulfill its mandate?

The criminal investigation of numerous allegations remains active and ongoing. Since its inception, the Task Force received an outpouring of complaints and statements from individuals who allege abuse and, in some instances, murder while at St. Joseph's Orphanage prior to its closing in 1974.

To date, dozens of victims have contacted the Task Force alleging criminal misconduct. Throughout the investigation, the Task Force remains committed to protecting the personal privacy of all victims.

In conjunction with the criminal investigation, over the last several months victim advocates have met with victims to fully document allegations and to provide support. As part of the interview and information collection process, victim advocates have worked with victims to discuss possible restorative measures.

What would a restorative process entail and what does the Task Force envision?

In addition to any possible prosecutions for crimes still within the statutes of limitations, the Task Force will complete a restorative inquiry. Over the last several months, a group of restorative justice specialists and victim advocates have worked with the Task Force to support the development of the inquiry. In order to foster impartiality and neutrality, the Task Force partnered with the Burlington Community Justice Center and an independent restorative justice consultant. The independent consultant is now laying the groundwork for the restorative inquiry, which includes meeting with and listening to victims, conducting outreach to those linked to the harms perpetrated at the Orphanage, and convening an informal advisory team to help design and plan the eventual restorative events and processes.

The restorative inquiry aims to support listening, reflection, and amends-making by the individuals and entities linked to the harms perpetrated at the Orphanage. At every stage, the restorative process aims to memorialize, honor, and learn from the voices and experiences of the former residents of the Orphanage.

How does the Task Force intend to publicly account for the results of its investigation?

The Task Force will publicly release its findings. The scope of any public report shall respect the wishes of the victims and their personal privacy in deciding to share their stories. The intention of the Task Force is that any public report will support the restorative process for the victims and assist the community in an understanding of how and why such misconduct occurred in the past and preventing any future occurrences.

Is the Task Force aware of the report of the Catholic Diocese?

The Task Force has been in communication with the Catholic Diocese's review committee about its findings. While the review committee's process was an independent and separate process, the Task Force was informed of the allegations made and perpetrators named in the report.

The cooperation of the Catholic Diocese, Vermont Catholic Charities, the Sisters of Providence and others who contributed to the ongoing operation of the Orphanage remains essential to the Task Force's ability to corroborate evidence and claims of abuse.

How do victims or others share information with the Task Force?

Victims or anyone with knowledge of what they believe may be criminal misconduct occurring at St. Joseph's Orphanage or elsewhere in Vermont are encouraged to contact the Burlington City Police Department's phone line at (802) 658-2704 or to complete an intake form available on the Department's webpage: <https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/Police/OrphanageInvestigation>.

Victims, family members, affected individuals, and community members who would like to learn more about participation in the restorative inquiry can contact the Burlington City Police Department or independent restorative justice consultant, Marc Wennberg, by phone at (802) 522-7394 or by email at marc@communityreentry.net.