

LOS ANGELES (CNS) – Victims of sexual abuse by priests in the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles are demanding that former Cardinal Roger Mahony and other high-ranking officials be publicly admonished for allegedly trying to cover-up clergy molestations and protect priests from law enforcement. Diocese officials said, however, they have apologized for actions of the past and taken wide-ranging steps to prevent abuse and report it quickly if it does occur.

The exchange came in response to internal church documents released on Monday, Jan. 21, as part of a pending civil lawsuit against the archdiocese.

"We are here in response to the hundreds of pages of documents that were released yesterday that showed that Cardinal Roger Mahony had personal involvement in the cover-up of childhood sexual abuse in the archdiocese," Joelle Casteix of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, or SNAP, said outside the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in downtown Los Angeles.

"He personally managed the careers of predator priests. And he and other high-ranking members of the archdiocese, including now-Bishop (Thomas) Curry, worked diligently to ensure that men who hurt children, who abused children and who destroyed communities were never going to see a day behind bars," she said. "We were shocked and disgusted to see these documents."

According to the internal church documents, Mahony and Curry – then a monsignor serving as Mahony's chief adviser on sex abuse issues – discussed ways to prevent law enforcement from learning about molestations of children by clergy in 1986 and 1987, more than a decade before the abuses became public knowledge. In confidential letters, Curry proposed strategies to prevent police from investigating three priests who had admitted to church officials that they abused young boys. Curry suggested to Mahony that they prevent the clergymen from seeing therapists who might alert authorities.

In one instance, Curry suggested that a priest be sent to "a lawyer who is also a psychiatrist" to keep their discussions "under the protection of privilege." Curry also suggested they send the priests to other states to further thwart law enforcement, according to the documents.

In one case, he suggested that a priest remain out of state to avoid the possibility that a young victim would spot him and contact police. In response to the release of the documents, Sandi Gibbons, a spokeswoman for the District Attorney's Office, said prosecutors "will review and evaluate all documents as they become available to us."

Mahony issued an apologetic statement on Monday, Jan. 21, admitting he had been "naïve" in his response to the problem. Curry, now the auxiliary bishop of the Santa Barbara Pastoral Region, did the same.

"I wish to acknowledge and apologize for those instances when I made decisions regarding the treatment and disposition of clergy accused of sexual abuse that in retrospect appear inadequate or mistaken," Curry said. "Most especially, I wish to express my sympathy to all the victims of sexual abuse by clergy."

"Like many others, I have come to a clearer understanding over the years of the causes and treatment of sexual abuse, and I have fully implemented in my Pastoral Region the archdiocese's policies and procedures for reporting abuse, screening those who supervise children and abuse-prevention training for adults and children," he said.

The archdiocese also issued another statement, noting, "No institution has learned more from mistakes made decades ago in dealing with priests who have abused young people" than the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

"We have apologized for the sad and shameful actions of some priests, as well as for our inadequate responses in assisting victims and in dealing with perpetrators," according to the archdiocese. "For more than a decade, however, few institutions have done as much as the Los Angeles Archdiocese to promptly report abuse allegations to civil authorities, to screen all those who supervise children and to train adults and children in the latest abuse prevention procedures."

"The past cannot be changed, but we have learned from it." The confidential files of at least 75 more accused abusers are slated to become public in coming weeks under the terms of a 2007 civil settlement with more than 500 victims.

