



Boston

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'Cardinal Law allowed this to happen': abuse survivors on archbishop's death

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“This is who I used to be. A smiling child,” said Alexa MacPherson, 42, a clergy abuse survivor, at a press conference held in [Boston](#) after the death of Cardinal Bernard Law on Wednesday.

“I made a lot of decisions to not let this eat me away,” she said, holding up a photo of herself as a child. “This is who you need to remember. The faces that Cardinal Law allowed this to happen.”

Law, the former archbishop of Boston at the center of a Boston Globe investigation that proved he failed to remove sexually abusive priests in his ministry, died on Wednesday in Rome.

Law's 19-year-tenure ended in disgrace and resignation in 2002 after it was revealed that he failed to stop child molesters in the priesthood from molesting thousands of children. As news of his death spread, victims of priests under his jurisdiction spoke out.



▲ Cardinal Bernard Law in 2002. Photograph: Ken Lambert/AP

MacPherson was repeatedly raped by [Pastor Peter Kanchong](#) of St Margaret's parish in Boston beginning when she was age three and continuing until she was nine, from 1978 to 1984. "It stopped when my father caught the priest trying to rape me on the living room table," she told the Guardian.

Her parents called the police, filed reports, and went to Dorchester district court to lodge a complaint. Kanchong was convicted and sentenced to probation.

"Conveniently, the court documents disappeared," she said. "Cardinal Law was solely responsible for having a contact in the district court for making documents disappear. I have a document proving that with his signature," she told the Guardian.

With the death of Law, she feels no relief, saying that the Catholic church's approach to clergy assault has not changed much. "They say they're going to make changes but they fall short every time. They don't back up what they say with action. Until they actually start to do that, nothing is ever going to change. My opinion won't change."

The news of his death came on the 15th anniversary of her story being published in the Globe's Spotlight investigation on 19 December 2002, dramatized in an Oscar-winning movie in 2015.

Another survivor of sexual assault by clergy feels differently about Law's death. "It's a relief," said Phil Saviano, 63, whose story featured in the film.

For Saviano, the nightmare began in 1964, when he was 11, attending catechism classes at St Denis church in the town of Douglas, Massachusetts. The newly appointed [Father David Holley](#) began to target Saviano and one other boy for over a year. The sexual assault stopped after Holley's 18 months at St Denis, but confusion and depression followed Saviano for years. Saviano has never figured out why Holley was removed from the parish, and for years thought that he was no longer with the priesthood. Holley was sentenced in 1993 to up to 275 years in prison on eight counts of molestation and died in prison in 2008.



▲ Phil Saviano in 1964. Photograph: Courtesy Phil Saviano

“I always remembered my abuse. I was clueless that he was still out there, and that there were other priests doing it, and I had extreme emotional consequences from my

childhood experience,” Saviano said.

In 1992, Saviano opened the Boston Globe to look at ads for holiday gifts when he stumbled on a short report saying that Holley had been arrested for assaulting young boys in a parish in New Mexico.

That’s when he decided enough was enough. He spoke with a Boston Globe reporter, and his account was [published in a story](#) on 21 December 1992.

He sued the archdiocese and eventually settled in 1995, for \$12,500. By this time, Saviano had contracted Aids, which he made known in court. He was not required to sign a nondisclosure agreement in the settlement. “I thought the lawyers for the diocese didn’t think I’d be around that long,” he said. But with life-saving inhibitor drugs, Saviano lived.

He began speaking with other victims and gathered statistics on Law’s cover-up. “I found out six bishops in four states had been involved,” Saviano said. “The priests would be sent to four different centers run by the church.” Because the centers were run by the church, they were not required to report to the state. Priests would spend some time at the center, then be transferred to another parish.

Saviano eventually got the attention of the now defunct Boston Phoenix, which published a story saying that Law knew about priests’ acts of pedophilia in the 1980s and did nothing.

The Boston Globe’s Spotlight investigative team dived into the story in 2001, eventually publishing a damning series of stories on the child molestation cover-up of Law’s archdiocese. Saviano’s testimony to the Globe was integral to the investigation, which discovered that dozens of priests had molested hundreds of children, a number that grew into the thousands and set off a nationwide examination of the scandal.

Saviano had heard Law was ill. He was out to dinner last night, celebrating the 25th anniversary of his speaking out, when he heard the news.



▲ The attorney Mitchell Garabedian, second from left, beside Robert Costello, left, Phil Saviano, and Alexa MacPherson, sexual abuse survivors, as they react to the death of Cardinal Bernard Law. Photograph: Bill Sikes/AP

“Yesterday was the 25th anniversary of my first public interview on my abuse. It seems cosmic to me. I’m glad to see him gone because he was such a target of anger and animosity from the survivor community.” He hopes that victims can start to let go of some of the anger.

Law **resigned 11 months after the Globe’s initial report**, embroiled in more than 500 lawsuits against the archdiocese by victims of abuse, after issuing several apologies and policy changes. He moved to Rome.

Mitchell Garabedian, the famed attorney who represented more than 500 people who allege abuse, **told the Boston Globe**: “Respectfully, society has not lost a great protector of children.” Garabedian helped reporters at the Globe unearth Law’s practice of transferring priests to other parishes after abuse allegations arose, with no penalties.

Saviano is working on a documentary project with the advocacy group BishopAccountability, helping document video interviews of clergy assault survivors across the US. “Many survivors want to set the record straight,” said Saviano. “It’s an important educational tool as well.”

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