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Duane Gray says the priest at his Connecticut parish began sexually abusing him around 1974, when he was 12 years old. He told his parents, but they didn't believe it and beat him repeatedly. Then they kicked him out of the house when he was about 16, and he found himself living in the woods.

Gray, 62, came forward publicly Tuesday to tell his story in the hopes it would allow some healing for himself and other victims of clergy sexual abuse. Last month, he said he reached a six-figure settlement with the Archdiocese of Hartford over his claims about the Rev. Daniel McSheffery, who died in 2014.

"Being able to talk about it, being able to have a resolution in my case meant everything," Gray said during a video conference with his lawyer and reporters. "It would help me greatly, personally, if we can just stop one case from happening or more. And ... that's what I'm striving for — to shine a light on it and to keep it alive so that they can't brush it under the rug just by paying people off."

David Elliott, a spokesperson for Hartford Archbishop Christopher Coyne, said the archdiocese has a longstanding policy to not comment on abuse allegations and settlements.

"The Archdiocese of Hartford continues to apologize and work with victims of clergy sexual abuse and their families to bring them a lasting healing," he said in a statement. "Archbishop Coyne and his staff are committed to doing all that is humanly possible to ensure that this never happens again and that our churches are

safe places for children and families at all times.”



This image from a press conference on Zoom, Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2024, shows Duane Gray, 62, who says his priest began sexually abusing him when he was about 12 years old around 1974 at a Connecticut parish, came forward publicly for the first time to tell his story with the hope it would allow some healing for himself and other clergy sexual abuse victims. (AP)

Gray, speaking from his workplace in Clinton, a town about 20 miles (32 kilometers) east of New Haven along the state's southern shore, said the sexual abuse happened at St. George Church in Guilford and continued for about two years until around 1976. He didn't go into detail about the incidents.

In 2019, the Hartford Archdiocese revealed that it had paid out [more than \\$50 million](#) to settle 142 sexual abuse claims against 32 clergy members. At the time, The Hartford Courant reported that McSheffery had 20 claims against him settled for nearly \$11 million.

McSheffery, who the archdiocese says was ordained in 1956 and removed from ministry in 2002, is on the archdiocese's [list of priests](#) who were involved in legal settlements or otherwise credibly accused of sexually abusing minors dating back to 1953. He was assigned to several parishes in the state during his career.

Like many other victims, Gray accused church officials of covering up sexual abuse and protecting accused priests.

Gray said he resisted McSheffery's last attempt to abuse him. Afterward, another priest called his parents, telling them that their son assaulted McSheffery and stole from the church. His parents, who were deeply religious, didn't believe him when he told them about the abuse, he said.

"My life turned into a living hell," Gray said. "I endured daily beatings and I was forced out of the home at a very young age. I ended up sleeping in woods in a tent while attending school."

He said he set up a tent not far from his home on town-owned property near a river. Three weeks later, he went to the tent from school and found it and all his belongings gone. He said the town had apparently cleared out tents belonging to himself and other homeless people who were staying there. But a friend's mother allowed him to live in their home.

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Gray, however, said he began turning to drugs and alcohol to deal with what happened. He said he became "out of control."

After high school, he said he moved to Florida to get away from Connecticut and to straighten out his life. He said he worked in Florida for nine years as a drug and money laundering agent for the state Revenue Department. He later returned to Connecticut to take care of his ailing father, who died a day before he arrived, and later his mother, who also fell ill and died.

Years after he was abused, he said he found out his younger brother also was sexually assaulted by McSheffery at the church, where they were altar boys. He said his brother also received a settlement from the archdiocese, and that he feels guilty for not protecting his brother, who died in 2014.

Gray has previously spoken publicly about the abuse, but not in as much detail as on Tuesday. In 2019, he testified at a hearing before Connecticut legislators about the need to eliminate the statute of limitations to prosecute serious sex crimes and file lawsuits — a proposal he still advocates for today.

The Associated Press generally does not name victims of sexual assault unless they choose to go public, like Gray has.

Gray's Boston-based lawyer Mitchell Garabedian, who has represented many clergy abuse victims, called on the Hartford archbishop, Coyne, to support eliminating the statute of limitations for filing lawsuits with abuse claims and to disclose the archdiocese's current efforts to protect children.

In 2002, Connecticut lawmakers increased the statute of limitations for people who were abused as minors, allowing them to file lawsuits up to age 48. Gray's claim against the archdiocese was outside that time period, but he was able to reach a settlement through mediation, Garabedian said.

Gray said he's still thinking about what to do with his settlement money and hasn't spent any of it. He said he wants to help other abuse victims.

Looking back, Gray said what he went through seems "surreal."

"You have to remember, I was young. I wasn't fully developed or mature," he said. "And plus, ignorance is bliss. But I grew up really fast. Real, real fast. And I wouldn't wish that on anybody."