

Clergy sexual abuse whistleblower Phil Saviano dies at 69

by [William J. Kole](#) in the [December 29, 2021](#) issue



(AP Photo/Andrew Medichini, File)

Phil Saviano, a clergy sexual abuse survivor and whistleblower who played a pivotal role in exposing decades of predatory assaults by Roman Catholic priests in the United States, has died. He was 69.

Saviano's story figured prominently in the 2015 Oscar-winning film *Spotlight*, which dramatized the *Boston Globe* investigation that revealed how scores of priests molested children and got away with it because church leaders covered it up.

He died on November 28 after a battle with gallbladder cancer, said his brother and caregiver, Jim Saviano.

Saviano played a central role in illuminating the scandal, which led to the resignation of Boston cardinal Bernard Law and church settlements with hundreds of victims.

“My gift to the world was not being afraid to speak out,” Saviano said in an interview earlier this year.

A self-described “recovering Catholic,” Saviano went on to establish the New England chapter of the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests, an organization working to bring specific allegations of clergy sexual abuse to light. By the early 2000s, Saviano was spending ten hours a day on the phone with victims and journalists. He was an outspoken critic of the Vatican’s reluctance to deal decisively with the fallout from the scandal.

Saviano enjoyed traveling and developed a soft spot for indigenous art. In 1999, he launched an e-commerce website, Viva Oaxaca Folk Art, which showcased handmade decorative pieces he purchased on trips to southern Mexico and resold to collectors across the United States. —Associated Press