

Clergy Abuse: Unveiling the Coverup

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The offender is a priest. He is friendly, reassuring, comforting, respectful, respectable, professional, knowledgeable, compassionate, caring – a good man. He is in a position of trust, leadership, authority. He targets one or two or 20 victims – male or female, pre or post pubescent or adult. He cultivates the target, preparing her or him: he invites confidences, offers friendship, creates or joins social opportunities. He offers camping trips, dinners, picnics, family visits. When he feels trusted enough he commits the abuses, assaults, violations. He gains silence through smooth talk, explanations, persuasion, threats, promises of harm. He continues the abuse until the victim is no longer accessible or until exposure is threatened or imminent.

His bishop hears of the abuse – in a letter, in whispers, in person, clearly, emphatically, repeatedly. The bishop ignores it. He knows a scandal will erupt if the abuse is revealed. He blames the victim, is in denial, treats it as an aberration, believes treatment is the answer, is blinded by his friendship with the offender, is an offender himself.

The bishop leaves the priest right where he is. Or he moves the priest to a new parish, church, hospital, school, nursing home. And warns no one.

Weeks, months, years later – continuously – the same priest abuses again. And a victim speaks up, asks for help, tells his story. The priest is surprised and wounded that anyone would suspect or accuse him. The bishop says, “He said he never did that.” “He promised not to do it again.” “He got treatment.” The latest victims are stunned to learn that the priest had a known history of abuse and was allowed to harm them. The previous victims are stunned to learn that the priest was given more opportunities to victimize. Weren’t they promised he would be removed from his priestly duties?

Then comes doubt, denial, recrimination, victim blaming. All heads swivel toward the victim. And the questions begin: Why believe his story? Her story? Their stories? After all, the victim was pre-pubescent at the time and has an unreliable memory. The victim was post-pubescent and probably wanted, enjoyed, sought out, provoked the abuse. The victim is male; this must be a homosexual encounter. The victim is female; she seduced him, she wanted it. The victims must want money; they make up these stories to get a piece of the pie. And always: Why did she wait? Why didn’t he tell when it happened? Why now? The victim knows the subtext: “You are a liar. Priests tell the truth.”

Diocese after diocese writes check after check for settlements, church spokespeople say the victim was seductive, compliant, unreliable, negligent, complicit, greedy, a liar. Lest we forget: the wrongdoers pay to buy silence or to comply with court orders – not to acknowledge, compensate, apologize or make whole.

And the beat goes on. The institution makes gestures toward new policy, new procedures, new personnel. The victims become exhausted, and finally are silent, in agony over the public dissection of their private torment. After following the story for days, weeks, months, the media loses interest and moves on to something new.

All is still. And in that silence, rape and sexual abuse continues.

And the Catholic Church is not alone. Sexual abuse happens in every institution. It happens in schools, nursing homes, prisons, juvenile detention centers, group homes, day care centers, hospitals, mental health centers and the private offices of therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors and others in helping professions.

Anywhere people seek help, sanctuary, direction, advice – anywhere someone with authority, status or resources is in a position to guide, direct, or aid – that is a place of vulnerability and access. That is a place where the young, aged, female, disabled, incarcerated, infirm, disenfranchised are targeted by a predator. And the predator who is lauded, promoted, hidden and protected by the institution he represents is the most dangerous among us. He can prey with impunity.

Because we do not believe victims, because we do not believe such a nice man could have done that, because we do not sustain long-term interest in the story, we turn away, tune out, move on. We do not demand exposure and accountability; we do not stop the sexual abuse and rape of women and children.

The federal government does not create a bureau to combat the rape of women and children. Local, state and national governments do not take steps to bring an end to sexual violence. The defense budget does not include defense of women and children against the daily violation of rape. As a nation we let rape not matter, at least not enough to stop it. How many victims will it take?

The recent torrent of revelations about sexual abuse in the Catholic Church is not surprising. For years, victims have spoken of exposure to pornography, fondling, sexual abuse, rape and sodomy at the hands of priests. Their stories have been squelched, denied, hushed up. Occasional local scandals have received press attention for several days or weeks. But the church, until now, has always been able to control the story, buy silence, quell fears, reassure parishioners and quickly return to pattern: abuse and cover-up.

In 1994, *Coalition Commentary* featured a lead article entitled “Indifference and Complicity: Sexual Abuse in the Church.” This article addressed a sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church; the crisis went underground for several years and emerged this past January bigger, louder, more persistent and more public than in the Church’s long history of sexual abuse by priests. Except for the sheer size of the current crisis, nothing else has changed much. See for yourself. Compare excerpts from our 1994 article with the latest news on sexual abuse in the church.

1. The People

1994

In Belleville, Illinois, nine priests are currently being investigated on charges of child sexual abuse. To date, five priests have resigned from the ministry, and the others

have been placed on administrative leave. The situation has been defined as a “sex ring.”

[In another diocese] an award against a priest named Thomas Adamson...came as punitive damages against the diocese for “willful indifference or deliberate lack of concern.” For 23 years, the church knew about Adamson’s molestations of children, but continued to transfer him to new parishes. Adamson molested as many as 35 boys.

2002

Tucson, Arizona: Four priests sexually abused children between 1967 and 1989. **Number of known victims: 16.**

Los Angeles, California: Police are investigating more than 50 current and former priests for sexual abuse of minors dating back to the 1960’s. Cardinal Roger Mahoney is under scrutiny for failure to respond to multiple reports of sexual abuse and for transferring priests among parishes to hide abuses and protect the church. An April 30, 2002 lawsuit against Mahoney alleges abuse of two sets of brothers and that Mahoney’s protection of abusive priests constitutes a criminal enterprise. **Number of known victims: Not yet calculable.**

Joliet, Illinois: Since April 2002, nine priests in the Joliet diocese have resigned or been removed for sexual abuse perpetrated during the last 25 years. One has been reinstated and two more priests are being investigated for alleged abuse. **Number of known victims: Not yet calculable.**

Illinois: Sexual misconduct has been reported in all six dioceses: Belleville, Chicago, Joliet, Peoria, Rockford and Springfield. **Total number of victims: Not yet calculable.** (See page ____)

Wichita, Kansas: Robert Larson pleaded guilty to one count of indecent liberties with a child and three counts of sexual battery. **Number of known victims: 9, 5 of whom are dead, all suicides.**

Louisville, Kentucky: Since April, 2002, the Archdiocese of Louisville has been sued for abuses committed by 23 priests and 4 other church employees between the 1950’s and 1990. **Number of known victims: 156 included in the lawsuits.**

Boston, Massachusetts: John Geoghan sexually abused children between the early 1960’s and the mid 1990’s. A lawsuit filed Monday, July 22 asserts that Geoghan participated in a sex ring with two other priests at the now-closed House of Affirmation in Whitinsville, Massachusetts. According to the *Boston Herald*, July 25, 2002 “The accusation of a child sex ring echoes that of a settled suit....suggesting other priests involved with the House of Affirmation shared boys.” **Number of**

known victims: at least 86

Massachusetts and California: Paul Shanley has been indicted for the abuse of children between 1979 and 1989. Throughout his career as a priest, Shanley openly advocated sex between men and boys. **Number of known victims: 4 in the Massachusetts indictment, countless others not included in current criminal case.**

Detroit, Michigan: Between March 20 and July 7, 2002, the Archdiocese has removed 14 priests based on sexual abuse allegations. **Number of known victims: Not yet calculable.**

Las Vegas, Nevada: Mark Roberts was charged with fondling, photographing and massaging teenage boys he was counseling in his parish. **Number of known victims: 8.**

New Hampshire: Eleven men have filed a civil suit alleging sexual abuse by six priests and a religious brother between 1958 and 1982. The abuses occurred in the church, at church camps and on day trips with the priests. **Number of known victims: 150.**

Seattle, Washington: Three separate suits have been filed against the archdiocese of Seattle for abuses perpetrated by James McGreal between 1948 and 1988. McGreal sexually assaulted the victims in the church, school and rectory. He forced the victims into sexual positions and showed them pornography featuring young boys. **Number of known victims: 14.**

And the list goes on...and the list shows both the pervasive nature of the abuse and the ways in which the church has been complicit with its continuation.

2. The Cover-Up

1994

Cover-up sometimes exists because men in the church hierarchy are themselves abusers. An article in the Milwaukee Sentinel notes that five bishops have received psychological treatment as child sex offenders.

2002

Cover-up does indeed exist. Two reporters at the *Dallas Morning News* spent months researching a story published June 12, 2002 describing the extensive role of bishops in silencing victims, blocking investigations and permitting abuse to continue. The research by Brooks Egerton and Reese Dunklin resulted in a searchable database with detailed accounts of how bishops across the nation covered-up abuses by priests and

permitted priests accused of abuse to keep working.

The data shows that nearly two-thirds of U.S. bishops let accused priests continue their work, some in the same parish where the abuse report originated, and others in new parishes where parishioners have not been informed of the priests' abusive conduct.

- 111 of 178 leaders of dioceses in 40 states kept accused priests working. (That is 62%.)
- The 111 bishops ignored warnings of suspicious behavior, kept priests on the job after admissions of wrongdoing, sexual disorder diagnoses, legal settlements and criminal convictions.
- All eight U.S. cardinals let abusive priests continue their work. (That is 100%.)

Egerton and Dunklin's research also provides accounts of abuses committed by the bishops themselves. Eight bishops have been accused of sexual misconduct in 2002.

3. The Backlash

1994

The church is beginning to respond aggressively to lawsuits by attacking victims and their families. In a case involving Rev. Daniel Calabrese of New York, Calabrese pled guilty in criminal court to sodomizing a teenage boy. But in its response to the civil suit, the church blamed the child stating that he "willingly consented."

2002

There is always a backlash

In April, Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston, beleaguered by claims that he protected abusive priests, defended himself by blaming the victim. Reported in the *Boston Globe* on April 29, 2002, "In his first legal response to charges that the Reverend R. Shanley began molesting a Newton boy when he was 6 years old, Cardinal Bernard F. Law has asserted that 'negligence by the boy and his parents contributed to the alleged abuse.'"

Others suggest that victims are making false allegations in order to cash in. Roger Mirin, suburban Chicago businessman, formerly a priest and a friend of both a bishop and a priest accused of sexual abuse, states that he never knew of any inappropriate behavior by either man. As reported in the July 24, 2002 *Joliet Herald-News*, Mirin states "There's clearly people out there to make some money by filing claims against the church" or "cash in."

Many parishioners have rallied in support of victims and demanded accountability from priests, bishops and the church hierarchy. Others deny the abuse, demand reinstatement of a favorite priest who is revealed as an abuser and suggest that the abuse stories are fabrications intended to harm the church.

4. The Church Response

1994

However, with the increase in lawsuits and negative publicity, some parishes have begun to take action. For example, the archdiocese of Chicago instituted a panel study which issued a 90-page report.

The report, “The Cardinal’s Commission on Clerical Misconduct with Minors,” reveals the church’s historical reliance on treatment and forgiveness as methods for dealing with sexually abusive priests. It states, “Archdiocesan policies and procedures were evolving which, while compassionate and pastoral, did not reflect a full understanding of the intractability of the problem.” Despite its apparent effort to address the problem, the report has serious shortcomings.

2002

Once again, lawsuits and negative publicity have prompted action. The deluge of cases brought to light – by victims and the press – since January 2002 has moved the church to act. The U.S. Conference of Bishops devoted 3 days in June to creating a document entitled “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.” This charter was created by bishops, the majority of whom have participated in the cover-up: they wrote it; they adopted it; they’ll implement it. Think about it.

According to a July 22 story in the *New York Times* this newly adopted charter will probably not apply to priests who serve in orders: that is 1/3 of priests in the U.S. And those priests are assigned to parishes, hospitals, schools, nursing homes – all the same places other priests work. It will take years and several teams of criminal, civil and canon lawyers to find all the other loopholes in the charter. And, nowhere does this document, or any other product of that meeting, include any accountability plan for bishops and the church hierarchy that have orchestrated and engaged in the extensive, long-term cover-up.

5. The Money

1994

Allegations of sexual abuse cost the Catholic Church \$2.8 million in 1993, up \$1.1 million from the year before. To date, more than \$500 million has been spent by the

Catholic Church defending itself and paying survivors.

2002

Current estimates indicate that to date more than 1 billion dollars has been spent by the Catholic Church defending itself and compensating survivors. It is difficult to get a clear picture of the costs of the crisis. Some dioceses have not published information about costs. Some costs cannot be revealed because of confidential legal agreements (the same agreements that coerced victims into silence). And there is no standard way that dioceses report costs: costs include direct victim compensation, payment of therapy costs for victims, legal fees, salaries for abusers on paid leave, therapy for abusers, etc. Three things are certain: 1) the church will not go broke, 2) we will never know what the church paid for the abuses of its priests and the cover-up and 3) victims have paid and will continue to pay the dearest price.

6. Beyond The Catholic Church

1994

Sexual abuse by clergy is not confined to the Catholic Church.

2002

As the bishops point out in the conclusion to their new charter, “Nor are priests the only ones guilty of it.” (Is this an excuse? Does that make it right?) A 30-minute search of the Internet produced articles referencing sexual abuse by clergy in the following U.S. churches and denominations.

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| Church of Nazarene, MN | United Methodist Church |
| Reform Synagogue, NY | American Baptist Church |
| Calvary Community Church, LA | Hindu |
| Chapel Hill Harvester Church | Buddhist |
| Olivet Lutheran Church, ND | |
| Mormon Church, UT | |
| House of Prayer | |
| Liberty Baptist Academy, IN | |
| African Methodist Episcopal Church | |
| Grace Christian Ministry | |
| Episcopal Church | |
| Baptist Church | |
| Presbyterian Church | |
| Southern Baptist Church | |

The International Society for
Krishna Consciousness
Spiritual Baptist
Jehovah's Witness

Seventh Day Adventist
Himalayan International Institute of
Yoga Science and Philosophy
Calvary Temple

This doesn't include the many references to churches in other countries including: Canadian Anglican Church, a Shinto Shrine in Japan and Catholic churches worldwide.

Church – the perfect place to meet people who seek or need solace, guidance, comfort, counsel. The perfect place to establish rapport and trust with those in need. The perfect place to target the vulnerable. The perfect place to hide behind faith while exploiting the faithful.

7. What's Next?

Anti-rape workers are patient. We have cooperated, collaborated and compromised with those in positions of power. We have waited, patiently and furiously for change. We have reached across chasms of doubt, mutual suspicion, anger and angst to create allies in every institution in this country. We have tolerated continued abuse and continuous denial of its prevalence and impact.

We have cajoled, pleaded, persuaded, argued and worked tirelessly to move every institution toward an understanding of rape. What it is. How it harms the victim. How it harms all of us.

We are tired of being patient. We are tired of ignorance. We are tired of denial. We are tired of excuses and lip service. We are tired of defense of the indefensible. We are tired of stonewalling, victim-blaming, confidentiality agreements that protect institutions and silence victims. We are tired of institutions protecting themselves instead of the people they are there to serve. We are even tired of apologies.

We want action. Meaningful action. Action to end sexual violence.

Ask questions – Ask direct, insistent questions. Why does my diocese keep a bishop who has denied victims and protected abusers? Why would I give money to that church? Does my contribution support abuse or cover-up? What spotlight can I shine on this church to illuminate wrongdoing? How can I make the church accountable to me, my child, my family, my neighbors, my community?

Pursue Legislative Change – Ask your legislative representatives to explain the state's mandated reporting act and the loopholes it provides for clergy (See page ____). Insist on change to make the mandated reporting statute apply to clergy – without loopholes.

Examine Policy and Practice of Your Church and Other Institutions – Ask the leaders of your church, school, day care, etc. to show you their written policies in the

event of sexual harassment/sexual abuse/rape. Can they show you a policy? Do they follow it? How do you know? Insist on effective policy and evidence of implementation that includes sensitive responses to victims.

Ask for Government Intervention – We all pay taxes. Ask that your tax dollars support effective criminal justice system responses to sexual assault, advocacy and counseling services for victims, prevention education programs for youth and their adult caretakers in schools, churches, camps and other institutions charged with the safety of children. Ask the federal government to give sufficient attention and care and study and funding to stop the terrorism that is rape.

Communicate – When you learn of sexual abuse in any institution, talk about it. Call. Write a letter. Ask for a public meeting. Ask for accountability. Support changes. Be visible. Regarding the current Catholic crisis, call the Pope; the cardinals; the U.S. Conference of Bishops and their president appointed by the bishops, Bishop Wilton Gregory; and Frank Keating, Chair of the sexual abuse lay board appointed by the bishops. Talk to your local bishop or priest. And keep talking about, asking for, demanding an end to sexual abuse.

Believe Victims – Most important of all, listen to victims. Believe their stories. Honor their courage.

It is not so much to ask. It is not too much to expect. All it requires is that we devote ourselves to change.