



SECRETARIAT OF CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION • UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Articles

Church Still Challenged to Deal with Clerical Abuse of Minors

By Beth Griffin

The church has made significant progress in dealing with clerical sexual abuse of minors, but it must continue to be vigilant because healing is a long-term process. Part of the challenge is to incorporate the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* into the fabric of church life.

Since 2002, dioceses have taken unprecedented steps to confront the issue, assist the victims, seek forgiveness, ensure the safety of minors, and restore credibility.

Healing of victims is a primary concern moving forward, said Bishop Gregory Aymond of Austin, Texas, chair of the U.S. bishops' Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People. "First and foremost, we must reach out to those who have come forward and look for those who have not. We have to give them love and be a source of healing." Some victims want to deal with the issue on their own, but "others cannot and should not."

The church also needs to let people know what efforts have been made.

"The church is the only group that has undertaken a comprehensive program to educate children and the people who work with them," said Archbishop Harry Flynn of St. Paul and Minneapolis, chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse (which became the Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People). "There is a huge success story to tell, and we've told it, but I don't know if anyone is listening."

The success includes safe environment training for more than six million people and background evaluations for more than 1.6 million people who work with children in the church, according to Teresa Kettelkamp, executive director of the USCCB Secretariat of Child and

Youth Protection. The training is a centerpiece of the *Charter*, which the bishops adopted and called to be implemented in each of the 195 dioceses in the United States.

“We are challenged to be vigilant,” said Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Atlanta, former USCCB president. “We’re dealing with a situation that may have taken many years to come to the surface. We have to be vigilant that we are doing the right thing as we move forward and not grow despondent that the issue has not been completely settled. The victims and their families have been deeply hurt and still need our support.”

Archbishop Gregory recalled being asked: “How long is this going to go on?” “In truth,” he replied, “it will be years. It won’t make headlines, but the process of healing will go on for the rest of my episcopate. I will be responding to the needs of people.”

“We have apologized and we want the church to be purified,” said Bishop Aymond. “Our leadership has been challenged and our credibility has been lost. We have to restore credibility by proving that we are honest and straightforward. Credibility requires words and, more importantly, actions, and it takes time.” Specifically, he said, “We have to live out the spirit and letter of the *Charter*. We must reach out to victims and do justice, and we have to fulfill the mandate of Pope John Paul II, who said, ‘There is no place in the priesthood or religious life for those who would harm the young.’”

If there is any possible silver lining to the dark cloud of the abuse crisis, it may be, as Bishop Aymond said, that “the sexual abuse crisis in the church uncovered the fact that sexual abuse in the United States is far more common than we imagined.”

“We have an opportunity to be agents of change for the society,” he said. “Our *Charter* gives some guidance on how we expect situations to be dealt with, and we have developed the safe environment program,” which can be used as a model for others.

###

Growth in Transparency Marks Church

By Joe Towalski

William Gavin knows the skeptics are still out there.

The head of the Gavin Group, which has conducted annual audits of U.S. dioceses since the bishops passed their *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* in 2002, acknowledges that a little skepticism is a good thing when it comes to monitoring compliance to programs designed to prevent child sex abuse.

But, Gavin added, the time has come for doubters to acknowledge that the Church has made considerable progress on the issue.

“The Catholic bishops are the only group in the United States that has stood up and said, ‘OK, here’s our problem,’” Gavin said. “Maybe they were pushed into it a little in the beginning, but they’ve embraced it, and now they’re driving it because it’s the right thing to do. I think that’s part of what the church should be about.”

Gavin and others who have worked closely with the church during the last several years say it is making strides to be more transparent and accountable.

In addition to the *Charter*, for example, the bishops established a National Review Board of lay people to independently monitor how their child safety policies are implemented. The board commissioned a study, first published in 2004, documenting the nature and scope of the sexual abuse crisis. A further study will focus on the causes and contexts of the crisis.

Yearly reports of *Charter* compliance based on the audits, coupled with annual reports from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University regarding the number of old and new abuse cases, have “proven to be an excellent example of transparency,” said Kathleen McChesney, former executive director of the bishops’ Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection.

In addition to the national figures, dioceses that publish more detailed local reports about abuse cases “are extremely important to this initiative,” said McChesney, who is also a former executive assistant director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. “Those bishops who are open and transparent about allegations . . . are admired for their candor and have obviously gained or regained the trust of the laity.”

Gavin said the church has come to see organizations like his as an ally, not an enemy, in the common cause of making the church a safer place.

“The people in the pews now also understand in a broader fashion what it is the church really does,” he said. “A lot of people received the sacraments and attended Mass, and that was about as much as they knew about their church. Now they understand codes of conduct, and they understand how to report child abuse cases, and they understand a whole lot more about their church. I think [the church] is becoming more participatory.”

One way Catholics have become more participatory is through mandatory diocesan programs that help to train and educate children and adults—from bishops to lay volunteers—in creating and maintaining safe environments.

“I think this has been a learning process for all of us in the church—first of all simply to have become aware of the signs and signals of abuse,” said Bishop William Skylstad of Spokane, Washington, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) from 2004 to 2007.

“We’re far more astute now than we were, say 15 or 20 years ago,” he said. “I think across the board we’ve learned that sexual abuse of children occurs not only in the church, but everywhere, and that’s really important. I think that people are now better prepared to spot abuse and to provide a safe environment.”

The church also is working to make further improvements in the area of child safety, Gavin said. Compliance auditors who ask questions of bishops and other church officials are also being sent into parishes to ask questions and verify information, Gavin said.

“More and more I’m hearing bishops and their staffs say, ‘We have a program whereby we go out and audit parishes,’” he added. “I couldn’t be more thrilled with that. That’s exactly the way we have to go.”

###

Working to Heal Hurts

By Robert Delaney

Overcoming being hurt by someone in the Church can be a long process—even a life-long process—say experts in dealing with victims of clergy sexual abuse. But the Catholic Church stands ready to help victims obtain professional counseling.

In many ways, the healing process parallels what would be involved in the case of abuse by someone in any institution—schools or government, for example. But it also has its special aspects, because for the survivor of clergy abuse “the Church represents God,” says Michael Morton, executive director of Guest House Institute in Lake Orion, Michigan. The Institute is an educational and training program of Guest House, known for its addiction treatment programs for clergy and religious.

Since the adoption of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 2002, the Church has generally done a better job of dealing with offenders and helping victims than have other institutions, such as police and schools, Morton says.

Survivors of clergy abuse are now not only heard but credited; action is taken to deal with culprits; and there is not only an expression of contrition, but also the offer of concrete assistance. There are, however, some exceptions, “and some people in leadership positions still need to understand better the gravity of the situation,” he says.

One diocese that figured prominently in the clergy abuse scandal has had one of the most active programs to help survivors.

“In the Archdiocese of Boston, over 700 survivors or their family members have contacted us, and 464 have received support from the archdiocese for therapy,” says Barbara Thorp, director of the archdiocese’s Office of Pastoral Support and Outreach. Many survivors of clergy sexual abuse suffer from conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic anxiety, depression, or addictions, and some have difficulties on the job or problems with family relations, she continues.

The archdiocese also pays for psychopharmaceuticals that might be prescribed. The willingness to pay for independent licensed therapists and prescriptions is without regard to any litigation the victims might be pursuing against the archdiocese.

While many people have benefited from counseling or therapy, healing the spiritual damage survivors have suffered remains “such uncharted territory” that there is no single path indicated, Thorp says. When a priest or other church employee becomes a “faith-destroyer rather than a faith-nurturer,” the results can be soul-searing. “This is probably the most profound aspect of the problem,” Thorp says.

Considering how abuse often also involved the profaning of a sacrament—in the confessional or in the sacristy before or after Mass—the fact that many survivors do manage to overcome the damage to their spiritual relationship is testimony “to the remarkable resilience of true faith,” she adds.

Sister Sheila McNiff, a Sister of the Holy Child Jesus and the victim assistance coordinator for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, understands how hard the healing process can be from listening to hundreds of survivors. “I have felt like a container for the rage that is so deep and so destructive of a person’s being. I have silently watched them as they angrily enter counseling. Then some join or start support groups and eventually struggle to talk with their family and friends about their pain and shame,” she says.

Morton says individual cases vary, depending on the extent, duration, and severity of abuse, as well as the person’s age when the abuse began, so there’s no single formula for successfully dealing with them. But he says the entire church—not just the leadership—can resolve that all future contacts with the church will be characterized by trust.

Thorp points to efforts in Boston. Not only is there a monthly Mass in the cathedral chapel for victims and survivors of clergy sex abuse, but Cardinal Sean O’Malley also led a nine-day Pilgrimage of Repentance and Hope in 2006 to churches that had experienced abuse incidents. “Cardinal O’Malley also invited the priests in attendance to prostrate themselves with him while a litany was sung in a true expression of atonement,” she says.

###

Healthy Child Protection Programs Age-Appropriate, Ongoing

By Peter Feuerherd

Catholic leaders in parishes and schools acknowledge a sad reality of modern life: Protecting children from sexual predators cannot be taken for granted.

The result: Education programs and new regulations to protect children are being instituted throughout U.S. parishes and Catholic schools.

What makes such programs healthy and effective?

Pam Church, vice president of parent education for Childhelp, an organization that addresses the needs of abused and neglected children, notes that education on child protection should be age-appropriate and ongoing.

“One-shot deals don’t work,” she says. Children need to get the message that abuse is not their fault. They also need to be taught skills to promote their own protection. At the same time, education on protecting children should be “inviting and kind” with a focus on the message that “God wants people to be safe and have happy lives.”

Parents, she says, should teach children on a regular basis about asserting themselves, just as they teach them to eat their vegetables. Parish and school child protection programs need to enlist parents, who have the best interests of their children at heart.

Training programs for teachers and other professionals should empower children to say “no” to those who would take advantage of them. For very young children, education should emphasize the dangers of inappropriate touching while acknowledging that “most touches are good touches and that most people don’t harm children.” As children grow into early teen life, they should be encouraged to come forth with questions about the kinds of touch that make them feel uncomfortable.

“Why does it feel so icky?” “Why am I so confused?” These are the kinds of questions that children ask when they are being abused, says Church, who says that child protection programs should focus on encouraging troubled youngsters to come forward.

Monica Applewhite, former president of religious services for Praesidium, a Texas-based firm that consults with organizations developing child protection policies, says good child protection programs emphasize the urgency of acting to intervene in potentially abusive situations. One problem is that seemingly minor behavior that makes people uncomfortable is

often socially awkward to point out. People usually feel there are two alternatives: dismiss the offending party or do nothing.

That's why, she says, it's important to have well-established rules regarding adult-children behavior in any educational or youth setting. For example, wrestling, making rude or suggestive comments, and encouraging children to address adult leaders by their first names can all be red flags suggesting even more inappropriate behavior.

Those who violate these rules can be talked to gently once the regulations are in place. For example, an adult supervisor in a youth program can gently be told, "We have a policy against wrestling with children."

According to Applewhite, it's easier to say that than it is to start accusing someone of being a sex abuser when there is no clear evidence.

"You can create an environment where abusers are not comfortable," she says. When regulations are in place, the early-warning behaviors of abusers can be curtailed. Good policies can define boundaries. The goal is not to ignore problem behavior.

Stereotypes of abusers need to be confronted. Often, notes Applewhite, there is a tendency to make sex abuse a simple case of bad people doing bad things.

Abusers are often, paradoxically, very concerned about children and often do valuable work. They can develop a reputation for good work with young people. There is even a tendency among some in a community to defend offenders once they have been exposed, because their reputations can be so positive.

The fact is, notes Applewhite, evil and good can exist in the same person.

Since appearance doesn't provide many useful clues, detection "has to be about what the person does," says Applewhite. Serious warning signs include children spending the night alone with an adult authority figure, or children getting pot or alcohol from an adult. Older children, she notes, can be taught about the patterns that sexual abusers will use to dupe their victims. Teens, she says, are wary of being educated simply about safety concerns. They will respond to an approach that counsels them about the dangers of being duped by a predator. No one in that age group wants to be known as an easy mark.

###

Learning from Clergy Abuse of Minors Scandal Can Help Others

By Joseph Young

The clergy sexual abuse scandal that rocked the U.S. Catholic Church five years ago was a painful period but a teachable moment. Healing and preventive measures have gained momentum since the U.S. bishops adopted the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* in June 2002 and formed an independent National Review Board.

Subsequently across the nation, in accordance with the *Charter*, diocesan review boards have been formed, safe environment programs put into place, annual audits on abuse implemented, and procedures for more careful screening of priesthood candidates adopted at seminaries.

There is also much that others can learn too, said Bishop Gregory Aymond, chair of the USCCB's Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People and bishop of the Diocese of Austin, Texas. He noted that two other Christian denominations and one school system already have asked his committee how to deal with sexual abuse by those in authority.

Ann Riggs, PhD, a member of the Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers) and associate general secretary for Faith and Order for the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., said that from the Catholic Church's experience with clergy sexual abuse, other churches have learned that ignorance is no excuse.

"You have to educate yourself so you are not naive," she said. Another lesson learned, Riggs said, is that supervisors cannot give candidates for positions in Church leadership the benefit of the doubt and dismiss questions about their background.

"You can't just assume their mental health and spiritual honor," she said. Finally, Riggs said, churches have learned from the Catholic experience that abuse compromises an institution's capacity to carry out its mission. Some funding for ministries is diverted to legal fees and settlements for victim/survivor counseling. Also, in a church wracked by scandal, those in the pew, if they remain in the pew, are less likely to contribute monetarily.

But it is not only institutions that can learn from the Catholic Church's experience, Bishop Aymond said.

"At every level of society, consciousness has been raised about sexual abuse. More and more, even families sitting around the table are discussing it openly," he said.

One topic is the importance of being vigilant, which Bishop Aymond said is perhaps the primary lesson to learn.

“You need to be very, very vigilant about picking up any signals that sexual abuse may be occurring,” he said.

Robert Bennett, Washington attorney and charter member of the National Review Board, said, “People need to realize that child abuse occurs in all sorts of places; you can’t be self-righteous and say, ‘It can’t happen here.’”

Closely related to vigilance is prevention. One preventive measure to be learned, Bennett said, “is not to allow dysfunctional men into the clergy.”

Bennett warned against using the “geographic cure”—which is no cure at all—of moving abusive pastors to other churches, and he also advised against “burying the abuse for fear of scandal, only to have a bigger scandal emerge” when the abuse is eventually revealed.

Another lesson is the importance of transparency and truth.

When allegations of abuse are made, Bishop Aymond said, the first order of business is to “find the truth of the matter” by prayerfully listening to all sides without bias.

All allegations must be investigated, Bennett said. Bishops, or whoever is in authority, must meet with victims and, in the process, not assume that they are not telling the truth. “You don’t want to act like you’re some risk assessment manager for an insurance company,” he said.

###

Preventing and Identifying Child Sexual Abuse

By John Gehring

Safe environment coordinators, researchers, and psychologists agree there is no definitive profile of a child sexual abuser. Instead, these experts speak about patterns of behavior, or “red flags,” that should alert adults that a young person may be in an abusive situation.

“If you start looking for a typical abuser in your mind, you are going to miss a lot of people,” said Paul Duckro, the director of the Office of Child, Adolescent, and Adult Protection in the Diocese of Tucson, Arizona. “Your net will have a lot of holes in it.”

A former medical school professor who specializes in the behavioral aspects of illness, Duckro said that people who are unusually secretive, shun supervision, or demand special rules that do not apply to others should raise concerns.

Sexually inappropriate behavior with a child often begins with a process psychologists call “grooming”—often subtle actions that can make children feel special, protected, and comfortable in situations that may lead to more deviant activities.

An adult could be grooming a potential victim, for example, when he or she frequently singles a child out for special gifts or looks for opportunities to be alone with a child. Abusers often attempt to view pornography or use alcohol with children to create intimacy and trust. While abusers cannot be easily classified and will demonstrate a range of personality types, Duckro pointed to a common characteristic they do share.

“Narcissism is a concern, with my needs at the exclusion of yours,” he said. “There is no empathy for other people or their needs.”

Msgr. Stephen Rossetti, the president and chief executive officer of St. Luke Institute, a Silver Spring, Maryland, residential treatment center for priests and religious who have psychological problems, believes the media has presented a caricatured view of abusers.

“The media has reinforced stereotypes like the ‘dirty old man’ when in reality there are many kinds of offenders,” said Msgr. Rossetti, a licensed psychologist. Despite their differences, he said, abusers do generally fit into subtypes that include the compulsively sexual person, the narcissist who uses others for pleasure, and the dependent person who is emotionally immature.

“Red flags” include adults who do not respect a child’s physical or emotional boundaries, lack peer relations, exhibit extremes in sexual experiences, show confusion about their sexual

orientation, or have a personal history of childhood sexual abuse. He was quick to note, however, that most adults who have been abused as children do not grow up to be abusers.

Msgr. Rossetti believes the Catholic Church has come a long way in addressing sexual abuse and points to the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*.

“Right now the Catholic Church has one of the strongest anti-abuse policies of any organization in the country,” he said. “But one case of abuse is always too many.”

Karen Terry, an associate professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the City University of New York, said there are several biological and psychological theories for why adults sexually abuse children.

“The most important point is that abusers constitute a heterogeneous population of individuals who begin abusing for a variety of reasons,” she said. “In addition, there is no clear ‘best practice’ as to how to treat or manage abusers, largely because the treatment and management plans should be tailored to their specific needs and risks. The best that I can recommend for prevention of child sexual abuse is education.”

###

Priest and Parishioner: Walking Side by Side

By Jane Harriman

After reading the profile of his new parish and meeting some of its leadership, the pastor went to dinner with a brother priest, who inquired, “So how do you think it will go?”

“Not well,” the pastor replied, feigning dismay. “Who can walk on water? The Lord Jesus Christ himself couldn’t meet their expectations.”

Priests may joke among themselves of the impossible relationship a parish expects to have with its new pastor, but in most cases, they are just joking.

“When I commission or assign a newly ordained priest for the first time, I tell him that to be successful two things are required: to be present and to be pleasant. The people are not really looking for much more than that—someone to follow them from cradle to grave, to be with them on their journey,” says Bishop Michael A. Saltarelli of the Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware.

Bishop Saltarelli believes that the relationship between pastor and parishioners remains at heart as close as it always has been. Despite the sex abuse scandal, despite a society that seems focused on Hollywood and Wall Street, despite fewer priests and more Catholics in more parishes.

Not all agree. Post sex abuse crisis, the relationship between youth and pastor may be suffering, notes Msgr. Stephen Rossetti, psychologist and president of the St. Luke Institute, a Silver Spring, Maryland, education and research center for priests and religious with mental or emotional problems or addictions.

“I think priests are more reticent about dealing with minors. I know I certainly am and I think my brother priests are,” Msgr. Rossetti says. “If I were taking a whole group of boys camping and I couldn’t get another adult to go with me, I wouldn’t take them by myself.”

Bishop Saltarelli would advise priests not to let the lingering wounds and anxieties of the sex scandal prevent them from reaching out to children and young people.

Certainly with children, Bishop Saltarelli says, one always exercises prudence and reaches out to them “always in the company of their parents. But children naturally want to hug their priest. When that happens, I don’t walk away.”

Father Cleve Kiley describes the role of a pastor as multi-layered and subject to misunderstanding even among those of the Catholic tradition. “He is a teacher and probably best

known to his people through the Eucharist and other sacraments. He is a spiritual bridge, a father. In some ways he is the icon of Jesus himself. That's something priests are mindful of."

Father Kiley, formerly a pastor in the Archdiocese of Chicago and a seminary dean, is now president of the Faith and Politics Institute in Washington, D.C., an interfaith, bipartisan agency that helps members of Congress approach their work spiritually. Before that, he was executive director of the Secretariat for Priestly Life and Ministry for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, where he served on the sexual abuse crisis management team and helped create the National Review Board and Office of Child and Youth Protection.

In administering the sacraments of the Church, Father Kiley says, a priest stands "*in persona Christi*," in the place of Christ—saying in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, for example, "I absolve you," when it is God who gives absolution.

"If we are transparent enough, what the people see is Christ. I think that is the essential bond between the pastor and the people." A priest, Father Kiley says, is human and has human faults and failings: "Part of me is sinful and broken," and that part he steps around in administering the sacraments. In celebrating the Eucharist, Father Kiley says, after the consecration, "when the priest kneels, that gesture shows that I was acting in God's person but I am not him."

#

Child Sexual Abuse in the United States: Problems, Progress

By Kate Blain

Reports of child sexual abuse are on the increase, and that's a plus. That it still is underreported is a problem. So say experts who deal with abused children.

Getting to the truth is not easy.

David Finkelhor, PhD, director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center (CCRC) at the University of New Hampshire, seems to sum up the problem of evaluating child sexual abuse in the United States in one sentence: "There is no single source for statistics on child victimizations."

The statistics may be improving, but they are still disturbing. According to a 2001 National Crime Victimization Survey, 1.9 of every 1,000 children in the United States are raped or sexually assaulted each year. CCRC studies estimate that from 1990 to 2003, the number dropped from 2.3 per 1,000 children to 1.2. That's a 46 percent drop in substantiated cases, but it still leaves children sexually assaulted at a rate three times higher than that for adults.

Better abuse reporting means "something's working," stated Finkelhor. He attributed the decline in cases to economic improvements, prevention efforts, incarceration of offenders, and the use of psychiatric medications for both juvenile and adult offenders.

Marsha Gilmer-Tullis of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children added to that list the fact that teachers, law enforcement officials, and medical personnel are now mandated reporters—required by law to report suspected abuse.

Education is the key, she said. Where children were once told to avoid strangers, families now understand that abusers are more often known to a child than not.

Charol Shakeshaft, PhD, of Hofstra University, studies sexual abuse by educators and broke down the statistics as follows: 25 percent of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by a parent or "parent substitute"; another 25 percent is by other relatives; and the rest is mostly by acquaintances. Only a small percentage of abusers are unknown to their victims.

Child sexual abuse crosses all boundaries of race or age. Girls are abused much more often than boys, composing 78-89 percent of victims. A third of those who perpetrate sexual abuse on children are juveniles themselves.

Whether socioeconomic status plays a role in abuse likelihood is debatable; but the experts agreed that whatever factors cause a child to be vulnerable can contribute to sexual

abuse. Finkelhor cited parental alcoholism and marital conflict as contributing factors. A major U.S. research project, the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, pointed out that “household dysfunction” such as domestic violence, mental illness of a parent, or drug use in a child’s home often went hand-in-hand with sexual abuse occurrence—abuse that, in turn, was revealed to “have a powerful relation to adult health a half-century later.”

“If you’re a child being bullied, your family’s struggling, [or] your esteem is not as high as it should be, you’re vulnerable to being groomed or seduced by somebody who’s able to hook into those insecurities,” Gilmer-Tullis concluded.

“Individuals who are going to prey on children are going to put themselves in situations where they have access to children. That could be anything [from] volunteering [to] sports programs,” said Gilmer-Tullis.

Perpetrators of sexual abuse, most of whom are male, speak a language that vulnerable children often want to hear. Gilmer-Tullis recalled instances in which predators acted appalled at a parent’s limits on a child, telling the child, “But you’re so mature.” Abusers also build trust by claiming to understand the child better than anyone else and flattering their victims with compliments.

Shakeshaft split sexual abusers into two categories: fixated abusers, who get their sexual gratification from children and are hard to stop from acting out; and opportunistic abusers, who are less likely to commit abuse when closely supervised.

Programs that focus on teaching children and those around them to guard against sexual abuse seem to be having positive effects. Shakeshaft’s studies on sexual abuse by educators list points to make with children, from avoiding adults who want to spend time alone with them to becoming aware that behavior changes in their friends might indicate that they have been abused.

“Rumors are an important source of information on educator sexual misconduct,” she noted in one study.

Finkelhor believes that better abuse reporting can be encouraged by making the process easier on the victim—“decreasing the burden and trauma of the investigation.”

“Speed up the investigation and trial; make sure the kids are interviewed by sensitive and trained individuals; reduce the likelihood of retaliation [by abusers]; make sure [victims] get counseling in the aftermath,” he added.

###

Seminary Screening Early Step for Healthy Priesthood

By Emilie Lemmons

Since the sexual abuse scandal unfolded dramatically in public view in 2002, Catholic seminaries have refined their admissions screening with more emphasis on attracting healthy candidates and keeping problematic ones out of the priesthood. Interviews examining candidates' sexual and dating histories are more common and thorough, for example, and diocesan vocations offices do a better job of filtering out men who don't make the grade before they even apply to the seminary.

"Not only are seminaries conducting careful psychological assessments, including assessments of a candidate's psychosexual maturity and capacity for chaste celibacy, but they are also providing an integrated program of formation in the area of human sexuality," said Msgr. Jeremiah McCarthy, director of accreditation and institutional evaluation for the Association of Theological Schools, based in Pittsburgh.

The stronger emphasis is reflected in the newest version of the *Program of Priestly Formation*, released by the U.S. bishops in 2006, Msgr. McCarthy said. The program governs seminary formation in the United States.

Officials are quick to point out, however, that the church has been working to strengthen seminary screening and formation for more than a decade.

Msgr. Stephen Rossetti, a psychologist who heads the St. Luke Institute, a Silver Spring, Maryland, residential treatment center for priests and religious with psychological problems, has seen a "modest increase in the amount of help" seminaries have requested since the early 2000s.

A trend noticed at the seminary level is that potential priesthood candidates are examined more thoroughly by diocesan vocations offices before they apply to the seminary.

"The dioceses that send us candidates are doing a much better job of screening before they come to see us," said Sulpician Father Gerald Brown, who became rector of St. Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park, California, in 2004.

It's an extra level of scrutiny that wasn't there a few years ago, he said. "In the past, a diocese might say, 'We're not sure about this guy, but let's send him, and the seminary can screen him out.' Now, they don't send him if they're not sure about it."

To be accepted into a seminary, all men seeking the priesthood must undergo standard psychological tests, such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and the Rorschach inkblot test. But those don't necessarily detect potential molesters, Msgr. Rossetti said.

In his consultations with seminaries, he said, he encourages them to include a "full, in-depth psychosexual history." A trained clinician sits down with each candidate and asks him about his sexual and relationship history. Questions range from queries about the man's sexual orientation to his dating life.

The clinician looks for a number of typical scenarios that might suggest a man is a higher risk for being a sexual abuser. Men who are emotionally regressed and immature raise a red flag. So do men who have been victims of abuse themselves and seem stuck in their victimhood. Compulsively sexual individuals, narcissists, and passive or dependent men who don't have healthy peer relationships also warrant further scrutiny, he said.

###

Victim Assistance Coordinators: They Gotta Have Heart

By Mary Hart

It's the rare job description that includes the word "compassionate," yet a crucial part of a victim assistance coordinator's job is to respond compassionately to the victims of abuse whom they assist. Since 2002, in compliance with the bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, a victim assistance coordinator has been on staff in virtually every diocese in the country.

The description of duties is threefold—to assist abuse victims in making a formal complaint of abuse to the diocese, to help arrange a personal meeting with the bishop or his representative, and to obtain support for the victim's specific needs.

The root of the word "compassion" means to "to suffer with," and the word has been expressed at its deepest level in the Archdiocese of Boston, where the child abuse scandal has left deep wounds. In her role as director of the Office of Pastoral Support and Outreach, Barbara Thorp of the Archdiocese of Boston—hired in her position shortly after the child abuse scandal became public in early 2002—speaks of the "myriad ways" the clergy sexual abuse has traumatized the abuse survivors, their families, the church, and the community as a whole, even non-Catholics.

She describes herself as "privileged" to work with survivors (she prefers the word "survivors" to "victims") and expresses her deep respect for them and their families. "It takes an extraordinary amount of trust," she says, "for survivors of clergy abuse to call upon our office for help. We're honored to be able to do what we can to help those who've been so hurt."

Those who contact the office are often referred by their attorneys, but some become aware of the assistance through the archdiocesan Web site or from therapists or social workers. Every claim of sexual abuse is taken seriously. The victim assistance coordinator does not investigate a case. Every complaint reported to the office is referred to the state attorney general. Most victims want their name included in the report, but they may file anonymously if they prefer.

Thorp is available to those impacted by the abuse to help them find therapy and set up a meeting with Cardinal Sean O'Malley. A staff person from the office accompanies the survivors and their families when they meet with the cardinal. According to Thorp, most survivors and their families welcome the opportunity to tell the cardinal what happened and the impact the

abuse has had on their lives. They find it important to express the spiritual suffering and alienation they've experienced.

Not only does the victim assistance coordinator's office help find therapists for survivors, but the archdiocese pays for survivors' therapy. In 2007, the Boston office supported 285 survivors in therapy, spending over \$1.1 million. Since the office opened, it has served more than 700 people.

In his four and a half years at the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Archbishop Timothy Dolan has met with 40 victims. Victim assistance coordinator Amy Peterson offers to set up a meeting once a victim enters the diocese's mediation program. According to Archbishop Dolan, some victims choose not to participate themselves but instead request a meeting with him for their parents or spouses, who also suffer "terrible pain and grief."

In the Los Angeles archdiocesan office of Victim Assistance Ministry, Sister Sheila McNiff, a Sister of the Holy Child Jesus and the victim assistance coordinator, focuses on reports of current and past abuse by clergy, paid staff, and volunteer personnel at parishes and schools in the archdiocese. She also works with families and individuals abused outside the parish or school. Her office makes referrals for spiritual direction, pastoral counseling, individual and couples therapy, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and trauma recovery groups.

As in Boston, each survivor in Los Angeles is offered the opportunity to receive an apology from the head of the archdiocese. One of Sister McNiff's duties is to help arrange a meeting between Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles and every victim in litigation. Currently, more than 580 people are in litigation in the archdiocese, so, she says, "it will take some time, but the firm commitment has been made to see each survivor."

###