

Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests

**SNAP's Response & Analysis of Abuse Survey Statistics
Released by USCCB on Feb. 18**

SNAP Press Statement

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SNAP presents some context & analysis of the self-reported clergy sex abuse numbers released by a Catholic panel last week. Here are nine points which lead to a more accurate viewpoint of the current status of the Catholic clergy abuse crisis.

1. The most significant, yet overlooked statistic from last week. . .
2. The single most telling number. . .
3. The numbers church officials downplayed. . .
4. The 800 pound elephant in the room. . .
5. The single most effective step the audits measured. . .
6. The most confusing statistic. . .
7. The five most common reporting errors about the "audit". . .
8. The two quickest, cheapest and most effective steps any bishop could take now. . .
9. The fine print that's worth reading. . .

Before looking at a few specifics, keep in mind that church officials admit speaking to only 135 victims in this process, far less than one per diocese. We know of only a handful from our group who were interviewed. And who better to help determine whether any of these alleged reforms are making a difference than the victims themselves?

1. The most significant, yet overlooked statistic. . .

A recent but little-noticed Zogby poll indicates that among Catholics, the bishops' job approval rating is down to 57%, its lowest point since the abuse scandal broke.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2005-02-15-our-view_x.htm

2. The single most telling number. . .

Last year, church officials spent five times more on their lawyers than on therapy for the more than 11,000 acknowledged victims. (p. 27)

3. The numbers church officials downplayed. . .

--- In the last five years, the number of abuse allegations roughly doubled from the previous five years.

--- Less than a third of the dioceses have "completed background evaluations for all required personnel." So more than three years after the crisis erupted, a convicted molester might still be working in 2/3s of America's dioceses. (p. 16)

--- Background checks are the bare minimum, They are inexpensive, proven steps that can quickly identify molesters. Yet 2,801 priests in America have still not undergone them. (p. 16)

--- One third of America's priests (14,000) belong to religious orders. But one third of those orders refused to even answer questions about how much abuse was reported last years. About seven percent of the bishops themselves refused to answer such questions.

(Church officials won't identify their brother church leaders who did not cooperate with this survey. If a bishop won't even answer a minimal self-survey, how are we to believe he's reformed?)

--- More predator priests were asked to "lead a life of prayer and penance" (66) than were defrocked (43). (See p. 13). No bishop who had abused or covered up abuse was asked to do either, as best we can tell.

4. The 800 pound elephant in the room.. . .

remains the bishops themselves, their role in all this, and their complete escape from any accountability. After more than three years of horrific scandal, not one bishop has suffered even the slightest consequence for his failures.

None fired, none indicted, none suspended, none demoted, and none even kicked off a US Bishops Conference panel or even asked to stay away from a US Conf. of Catholic Bishops meeting.

Not one has even voluntarily given up even one week's paycheck as a sign of remorse and contrition.

5. The single most effective step the audits measured. . .

are the "safe environment programs" which train children and staff how to spot signs of abuse.

The trouble is this is the one area in which bishops fell most short. Half of the students in Catholic schools haven't gotten this training. (p. 15) Almost 20% of the priests have not. Thirty seven dioceses were given "required actions" to take regarding safe environment programs, the most in any category.

6. The most confusing statistic. . .

Forty two accused priests "remain in active ministry pending a preliminary investigation of an allegation."
(7) Thirty five are diocesan and seven are religious order priests.

Since 2002, bishops have repeatedly pledged to suspend first, then investigate. Information for this report was collected through 12/31/04. This means that 42 possible predator priests have stayed in active ministry, around kids, for anywhere between seven and 59 weeks!

This is the first time this phrase, this category has ever been used.

7. The five most common reporting errors about the "audit". . .

A. calling it "tough". . . please read the "fine print" section below before making this value judgment,

B. calling it "independent". . . keep in mind that bishops wrote the charter, picked the woman overseeing the "audits," she worked out of the bishops' headquarters, and made sure that very few victims were interviewed.

C. calling it an "audit". . . it's a self-survey. There was no access to personnel records, no subpoena powers or any of the conventional "checks and balances" we associate with the word "audit."

D. failing to explain that the bishop' efforts to date focus strictly on policies, procedures, and paperwork, not on performance. The Charter does NOT require, and the "audit" do NOT measure, whether any of the so-called reforms have been implemented or are effective. (See the "fine print" below)

E. assuming that the church's abuse activity relates to or measures or impacts clergy sex abuse. Ninety nine percent of those receiving background checks and abuse training and signing "employee codes of conduct" and all the rest are lay people, not clerics. While these steps are good, they will have little if any impact on stopping clergy sex abuse.

8. The two quickest, cheapest and most effective steps any bishop could take now. . .

With proven, admitted or credibly accused abusive priests, every bishop could and should:

a) Post these names on their diocesan web sites the names of the proven, admitted or credibly accused abusive priests and ex-priests. (At least 700 of them walk the streets today.) With that knowledge, parents can protect their children. Without that knowledge, thousands of kids are at risk.

(Several bishops have disclosed these names: Baltimore, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Tucson, Spokane and others.)

b) Go to each parish where these potentially dangerous men worked and tell Catholics

- a civic obligation, to call law enforcement with any information (no matter how old) about possible sex crimes by clergy, and

- a moral obligation, to help track down and talk with any former parishioner or student or employee who was at this church when the molester worked here. Catholics should find and ask these individuals "Did Father Mike do something to you?"

Forget healing masses, apologies, studies, more policies, paperwork and procedures. Taking these two steps would have tremendous symbolic value (showing a bishop's sincerity) and practical value (protecting kids by warning families about likely criminals and helping to get them locked up).

Not one bishop has done this, with even one abusive cleric.

9. The fine print. . .

These are direct quotes from the document itself, which point to severe limitations on the validity and value of the information provided.

The audit process does not ensure that all offenders or potential offenders have been appropriately removed from ministry. (6)

Audits do not measure the complete implementation of some of the provisions of the Charter, nor the quality of response or effectiveness of the Charter. (2)

The quality of Charter-directed actions has yet to be measured. (6)

The audit did not allow for the review of personnel records. (xi)

Much of the information gathered relied on the sincerity, truthfulness, and integrity of the individuals providing the information. (xi)

It is dangerous to assume that compliance with this Charter is all that is necessary to prevent abuse. (ix)

The source of the information for the audits most often came from diocesan personnel. (5)

There are no documented threshold standards. . . (5)

In a few dioceses, specific attempts have been made to locate persons who reported their abuse in years past and to offer them additional assistance. (11)

The Charter is not clear on what type of outreach to individuals or to faith communities is to be offered. . . (12)

The (Charter) does not require investigations to be conducted in a certain way or completed within a set period of time. (13)

Each bishop is responsible for evaluating the content of the safe environment programs selected for his diocese.

If training programs had been selected and scheduled but not fully implemented, a diocese was found to be compliant. . .(15)

(The numbers in parenthesis are the page numbers from the Annual Report summary.)