

Catholic Diocese of Jackson

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Statement of John Jay College Report Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors

On May 18, 2011, a research team from John Jay College released a thorough study of causes and context of sexual abuse by priests during the years of 1950-2010. The report explains how physical settings and personal psychology played a role within culture and organizational environments allowing abuse to occur within the Catholic Church.

The report concludes that neither celibacy nor homosexuality are “the problem;” that clergy are no more likely to be abusers than the general population; and that abuse does not exist as a systemic part of the Catholic Church.

Significantly, the study shows that the majority of abuse occurred during the 1960-1980's by men who attended seminary during the 1940-1950's. In the 35 years from 1950 to 1985, a total of 810 allegations of child abuse were reported to Catholic Dioceses within the United States. After 1985, as more incidents of child abuse were reported in the news, the number of allegations jumped exponentially. For the same 35 year time period, 11,000 credible incidents were ultimately reported. That any type of abuse could happen in an institution charged with caring for all members of society - especially those who are weak, vulnerable and marginalized - is tragic.

Nonetheless, abuse of minors by Catholic clergy today is extremely rare. Since 2002, the Church has maintained a zero-tolerance policy so that all credible cases of child abuse are reported to civil authorities, internally investigated, and presented to a local review board of mostly laypersons. Those with credible accusations are permanently removed from ministry.

Furthermore, all Church workers (including priests, volunteers and parents) must go through safe environment training and virtually all dioceses are audited yearly by an independent auditing firm to assure compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. The Catholic Church commissioned the Nature and Scope study and the Causes and Context study to better understand the problem – these commissioned studies were unprecedented self-scrutiny, and unique among child-serving institutions in the United States, whether religious or secular.

Bishop Joseph N. Latino and the Catholic Diocese of Jackson once again offer their apologies to those who have been victimized by clergy abuse. No group has suffered more than the victims of these crimes. The sins of a few have seriously damaged the trust that must exist between bishops and priests, bishops and the laity, and between priests and their parishioners. However, an overwhelming number of priests and bishops have faithfully served God's holy people and have lived a life of dedicated service to God and Church.

The Diocese of Jackson is committed to protecting children. Sexual misconduct by church personnel violates human dignity and the mission of the Church. The Diocese of Jackson is

committed to ensuring that children being served by the Church are not at risk of sexual abuse by Church personnel. The spiritual well-being of all victims, their families, and others in the community is of particular concern to the Church. Beginning in 1986, the Diocese implemented a written policy and procedure regarding reporting and handling of sexual misconduct claims for lay and church personnel. That policy was updated in 1994 with the addition of a Diocesan Review Board and again in 2002 so that it would reflect the U.S. Bishops' Charter adopted in June 2002 in Dallas.

In accordance with the Dallas Charter, the Diocese of Jackson wishes to encourage any victim of sexual abuse by a member of the Catholic Clergy to come forward and begin the healing process. When an allegation is found to be credible, counseling will be offered, so that the healing process can begin in accord with our present diocesan policy. We encourage any victim to contact Ms. Valeria McClellan, Victims Assistance Coordinator at 601-326-3728.

For a complete description of the Protection of Children Policy and Program, please refer to the diocesan website, www.jacksondiocese.org/protecting-children.php.

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