

## US bishops say new John Jay report on abuse key to understanding issue

Carol Zimmermann Catholic News Service | May. 19, 2011

**WASHINGTON** -- U.S. Catholic bishops called the newly released report on the causes and context of clergy sexual abuse an important tool to gain insight into the scope of the problem and prevent it from occurring in the future.

"It is important for us to understand, as completely and accurately as we are able, the causes and context of this problem in order to respond appropriately for the safety and protection of our children and young people," wrote St. Louis Archbishop Robert J. Carlson in an editorial for the *St. Louis Review*, archdiocesan newspaper.

The report: "The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010," was released May 18. It was conducted by a team of researchers at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York and commissioned by the National Review Board, a lay consultative body created in 2002 under the bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

An earlier study on the nature and scope of abuse appeared in February 2004. The causes and context study commenced in 2006.

Detroit Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron called the comprehensive report "both sobering and significant," saying in a May 18 statement that it was "yet another indicator to keep us vigilant in our efforts for the protection of children and youth."

New York Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the report pointed out "that there was no single cause that led to the sexual abuse crisis. Neither celibacy, as some have suggested, nor homosexuality, as others have claimed, has been found to be a reason why a person would engage in sexual abuse of a minor."

He also said in a statement that the study "is a report to the bishops of the United States, not from them," noting that initial reaction to it was critical of U.S. bishops.

Members of Catholic groups unhappy with the study protested outside USCCB headquarters immediately before the document's release. Participants from Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, known as SNAP, Voice of the Faithful and bishopsaccountability.org, described the study as flawed, biased and not addressing the scope of the abuse crisis.

A handful of protesters carried signs reading: "Not True: Crisis Is Not Foreseeable" and "Not True: Crisis Was Long Ago."

Becky Ianni, director of SNAP in Washington and Virginia, told Catholic News Service she would like to see a study of bishops who moved abusive priests to other locations more than a study of abusive priests. Ianni, who was abused by a priest when she was a child, also said it minimizes her suffering to hear that the abuse she

experienced was a "product of the time period," referring to the report's link of clerical abuse to the social upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s.

The report showed that sexual abuse of minors by priests "increased steadily from the mid-1960s through the late 1970s, then declined in the 1980s and continues to remain low. Most abuse incidents occurred decades ago."

Baltimore Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien said that the report's link of increase number of abuse cases during a socially turbulent time period should not provide consolation.

"While it may be comforting for some to learn that there is nothing intrinsic in our church or its makeup that contributes to the presence of sexual abuse, it does not mitigate the damaging effects of sexual abuse that did occur in our church," he said in a column for The Catholic Review, the archdiocesan newspaper.

He also noted that although the abuse crisis is "a historical problem," it has "not been completely eradicated from our church or from our society. We have the responsibility to protect children entrusted to our care and we must be ever vigilant in our efforts to prevent any incident of sexual abuse."

Archbishop Dolan pointed out that the sexual abuse of minors affects every family, religion, school, organization, institution and profession in society and credited the U.S. Catholic Church for being "the first group anywhere to contract a professional agency" to examine the "causes and contexts of this scourge." He also said the study closely mirrors what has taken place in the New York Archdiocese, specifically that the vast majority of sexual abuse occurred decades ago and has declined sharply in the Catholic Church since 1985.

Archbishop Carlson apologized to those who had been abused by church officials and assured them of the church's "unshakeable commitment to protect our children" and make church facilities and programs safe environments for minors. He also urged anyone who had been abused by a church official to contact the archdiocese. Archbishop Dolan similarly apologized to abuse victims in his statement.

The archbishops praised local efforts of archdiocesan programs in place to implement the charter and provide safe environments for young people today, emphasizing such steps are key to preventing further abuse.

"After the painful revelations of the sexual abuse crisis, the only greater sin our church could commit would be a failure to follow the very policies and procedures we have in place to protect children and root out abusers. And that can never happen," said Archbishop O'Brien.

**Editor's Note:** The full text of the John Jay report is now available as a pdf file: [Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010](#) [1]

**For more coverage of the John Jay report, see:**

- [Bishops at center of abuse scandal, and potential reform](#) [2], RNS, May 18
- [Report spreads blame for Catholic sex abuse](#) [3], RNS, May 17
- [Diocesan programs help build 'safety barriers' against child abusers](#) [4], CNS, May 18 2011
- [No room for complacency in protecting children from abuse, bishop says](#) [5], CNS, May 18 2011
- [US bishops say new John Jay report on abuse key to understanding issue](#) [6], CNS, May 18 2011
- [Key quotes from National Review Board's 'causes and context' report](#) [7], CNS, May 17 2011
- [Key events in US church response to clergy sex abuse crisis](#) [8], CNS, May 17 2011
- [Bishops' child protection officer looks to church's next steps on abuse](#) [9], CNS, May 17 2011
- [Misperceptions of abuse problem common, John Jay report says](#) [10], CNS, May 17 2011
- [Major recommendations from 'causes and context' report on abuse](#) [11], CNS, May 17 2011

- [Causes and context report released on clergy sexual abuse of minors](#) [12], CNS, May 17 2011

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