

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the results of an empirically based study of the causes and context of the phenomenon of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests in the United States between 1950 and 2010. It is the second of two studies produced by researchers at John Jay College of Criminal Justice about sexual abuse by Catholic priests. The first study (the *Nature and Scope* study) focused on the description and extent of the problem from 1950 to 2002 and was published in February, 2004. The *Nature and Scope* study provided information about what happened, including the number of abuse incidents, the distribution of offenses geographically and over time, the characteristics of the priests against whom allegations were made and the minors they abused, the Catholic Church's response to the allegations, and the financial impact of the abuse incidents. This second study (the *Causes and Context* study) sought to understand why the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests occurred as it did by integrating research from sociocultural, psychological, situational, and organizational perspectives.

## METHODOLOGY

The research group investigated the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests using a combination of empirical approaches, both quantitative and qualitative. This work is necessarily retrospective, with research focusing first on what initiated an increase in abuse incidents in the 1960s; what caused them to reach a peak in the 1970s; and then what led to the sharp and sustained decline in incidence in the 1980s.

The comprehensive information collected in the *Nature and Scope* study shaped the investigation of the present study and served as a resource to verify results. The primary data sources for the *Causes and Context* study are as follows: (1) longitudinal analyses of data sets of various types of social behavior (for example, crime, divorce, premarital sex) over the time period to provide a historical framework; (2) analysis of seminary attendance, the history and the development of a human formation curriculum, as well as information from seminary leaders; (3) surveys of and interviews with inactive priests with allegations of abuse, and a comparison sample of priests in active parish ministry who had not been accused; (4) interview and primary data from the 1971 Loyola University study of the

psychology of American Catholic priests; (5) surveys of survivors, victim assistance coordinators, and clinical files about the onset, persistence, and desistance from abuse behavior; (6) surveys of bishops, priests, and other diocesan leaders about the policies that were put in place after 1985; and (7) analyses of clinical data from files obtained from three treatment centers, including information about priests who abused minors as well as those being treated for other behavioral problems.

## FINDINGS

No single "cause" of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests is identified as a result of our research. Social and cultural changes in the 1960s and 1970s manifested in increased levels of deviant behavior in the general society and also among priests of the Catholic Church in the United States. Organizational, psychological, and situational factors contributed to the vulnerability of individual priests in this period of normative change. The *Causes and Context* report provides data about the historical time period of the problem: the increase in incidence until the late 1970s and the sharp decline by 1985. Although no specific institutional cause for the increase in incidence was found, factors specific to the Catholic Church contributed to the decline in the mid-1980s. Analyses of the development and influence of seminary education throughout the historical period is consistent with the continued suppression of abuse behavior in the twenty-first century. The priests who engaged in abuse of minors were not found, on the basis of their developmental histories or their psychological characteristics, to be statistically distinguishable from other priests who did not have allegations of sexual abuse against minors.

## Historical and Sociocultural Context

- The "crisis" of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests is a historical problem. The count of incidents per year increased steadily from the mid-1960s through the late 1970s, then declined in the 1980s and continues to remain low. Initial estimation models that determined that this distribution of incidents was stable have been confirmed by the new reports of incidents made after 2002. The distribution of incidents

reported since 2002 matches what was known by 2002—the increase, peak, and decline are found in the same proportions as those previously reported.

- A substantial delay in the reporting of sexual abuse is common, and many incidents of sexual abuse by priests were reported decades after the abuse occurred. Even though incidents of sexual abuse of minors by priests are still being reported, they continue to fit into the distribution of abuse incidents concentrated in the mid-1960s to mid-1980s.
- The rise in abuse cases in the 1960s and 1970s was influenced by social factors in American society generally. This increase in abusive behavior is consistent with the rise in other types of “deviant” behavior, such as drug use and crime, as well as changes in social behavior, such as an increase in premarital sexual behavior and divorce.
- At the time of the peak and subsequent decline in sexual abuse incidents by Catholic priests, there was a substantial increase in knowledge and understanding in American society about victimization and the harm of child sexual abuse; changes were made in statutes related to rape and sexual abuse of children and in reporting requirements of child abuse and neglect; an understanding of the causes of sexual offending advanced; and research related to the treatment of sexual abusers was expanded.
- Features and characteristics of the Catholic Church, such as an exclusively male priesthood and the commitment to celibate chastity, were invariant during the increase, peak, and decrease in abuse incidents, and thus are not causes of the “crisis.”
- Most priests who had allegations of sexual abuse against minors were educated in freestanding seminaries or schools of theology. They were not significantly more likely than non-abusers to attend minor seminaries or foreign seminaries.
- The development of a curriculum of “human formation” as part of seminary education follows the recognition of the problem of sexual abuse by priests. Participation in human formation during seminary distinguishes priests with later abusive behavior from those who did not abuse. The priests with abusive behavior were statistically less likely to have participated in human formation training than those who did not have allegations of abuse.
- Regular assessment of priests once they are ordained varies considerably from diocese to diocese. Evaluation processes are usually reserved for the newly ordained in the first five years after their ordination. In most dioceses, pastors are not obliged to undergo regular assessment of any substance.
- Many accused priests began abusing years after they were ordained, at times of increased job stress, social isolation, and decreased contact with peers. Generally, few structures such as psychological and professional counseling were readily available to assist them with the difficulties they experienced. Many priests let go of the practice of spiritual direction after only a few years of ordained ministry.

### Seminary Education

- When priests who abused minors are grouped by the decade of their ordination to the priesthood, each group displays a distinct pattern of behavior. The social influences can be seen in the behavior of each ordination group, or “cohort.” Men ordained in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s did not generally abuse before the 1960s or 1970s. Men ordained in the 1960s and the early 1970s engaged in abusive behavior much more quickly after their entrance into ministry.
- The ordination cohorts of men entering the priesthood before 1960, and before any moderation of the regimentation of seminary life, represent 44 percent of those later accused of abuse.
- There was no evidence of any significant level of sexual activity among seminarians before the mid-1970s. The men ordained after 1975 had a lower level of subsequent abuse.
- Less than 5 percent of the priests with allegations of abuse exhibited behavior consistent with a diagnosis of pedophilia (a psychiatric disorder that is characterized by recurrent fantasies, urges, and behaviors about *prepubescent* children). Thus, it is inaccurate to refer to abusers as “pedophile priests.”
- Priests with allegations of sexually abusing minors are not significantly more likely than other priests to have personality or mood disorders.
- Sexual behavior in violation of the commitment to celibacy was reported by 80 percent of the priests who participated in residential psychological treatment, but most sexual behavior was with adults.
- The majority of priests who were given residential treatment following an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor also reported sexual behavior with adult partners.
- Those priests who had sexual relationships either before seminary or while in seminary were more likely to also have sexual relationships after ordination, but those relationships were most likely to be

with adults. They were not significantly more likely to abuse minors.

- Priests who had same-sex sexual experiences either before seminary or in seminary were more likely to have sexual behavior after ordination, but this behavior was most likely with adults. These men were not significantly more likely to abuse minors.
- Priests who were sexually abused as minors themselves were more likely to abuse minors than those without a history of abuse.
- Priests who lacked close social bonds, and those whose family spoke negatively or not at all about sex, were more likely to sexually abuse minors than those who had a history of close social bonds and positive discussions about sexual behavior. In general, priests from the ordination cohorts of the 1940s and 1950s showed evidence of difficulty with intimacy.

### Organizational Factors

- Prior to 1985, reports of abuse were predominantly brought forward by parents of the youths who had experienced abuse soon after the incident took place. By the mid-1990s, reports of abuse were being made by adults ten to twenty years after the incident date. In 2002, reports of abuse were more likely to be put forward by lawyers for the person who was abused, and many reports described incidents that happened thirty to forty years earlier.
- By 1985, bishops knew that the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests was a problem, but they did not know the scope of the problem. Though more than 80 percent of cases now known had already occurred by 1985, only 6 percent of those cases had been reported to the dioceses by that time.
- When allegations of abuse were made, most diocesan leaders responded. However, the response typically focused on the priest-abusers rather than on the victims. Data indicate that the majority of diocesan leaders took actions to help “rehabilitate” the abusive priests.
- There is little evidence that diocesan leaders met directly with victims before 2002; consequently, the understanding of the harm of sexual abuse to the victim was limited. As knowledge of victim harm increased in society generally in the 1990s, so did the understanding by diocesan leaders.
- In 1992, the American bishops endorsed the “Five Principles” in response to the sexual abuse of minors, but implementation of the principles was uneven among dioceses. These principles stated that diocesan leaders should: (1) respond promptly to all allegations of abuse where there is reasonable belief that abuse has

occurred; (2) if such an allegation is supported by sufficient evidence, relieve the alleged offender promptly of his ministerial duties and refer him for appropriate medical evaluation and intervention; (3) comply with the obligations of civil law regarding reporting of the incident and cooperating with the investigation; (4) reach out to the victims and their families and communicate sincere commitment to their spiritual and emotional well-being; and (5) within the confines of respect for privacy of the individuals involved, deal as openly as possible with the members of the community.

- Diocesan leaders were more likely to respond to the sexual abuse allegations within the institution, using investigation, evaluation, and administrative leave rather than external mechanisms of the criminal law. Many of the diocesan leaders’ actions were not transparent to those outside the church. This response framework, as well as the lack of transparency, is not an atypical response to deviant behavior by members of an institution.
- The procedures for formal canonical responses such as laicization, or dismissal from the clerical state, were complicated, time-consuming, and often avoided.
- The decline of abuse cases by 1985 is earlier and sharper than the decline in the levels of other deviant behaviors of the time (such as crime); contributing factors to this decline include activism by victims of abuse by priests, discussions of sexual abuse of minors at annual meetings of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and evolving diocesan responses to abuse and abusers.
- Some bishops were “innovators” who offered organizational leadership to address the problems of sexual abuse of minors. Other bishops, often in dioceses where the Catholic Church was highly influential, were slow to recognize the importance of the problem of sexual abuse by priests or to respond to victims. The media often focused on these “laggards,” further perpetuating the image that the bishops as a group were not responding to the problem of sexual abuse of minors.

### Onset, Persistence, and Desistance from Abuse

- Like sexual offenders in the general population, priests with allegations of abuse show patterns of behavior consistent with David Finkelhor’s often-quoted four-factor model of offending: (1) motivation to abuse (often emotional congruence with the minor, as well as a blockage to [nonsexual] intimate relationships with adults); (2) overcoming internal inhibitions to abuse (through the excuses and justifications that

alleviate their sense of responsibility for the behavior); (3) overcoming external factors (by creating opportunities for abuse to occur); and (4) overcoming the child's resistance (through grooming techniques).

- It was common for abusive priests to create opportunities to be alone with minors, for example, during retreats. These men often integrated themselves into the families of the victims.
- Minors who were abused typically did not disclose their victimization; the signs of abuse were not detected by those close to them. This silence, typical of the period of the 1950s through the 1990s, is one reason why the abusive behavior persisted.
- Detection and an official report were rarely the reason for the end of an abuse incident, as reports of abuse were often made decades after the abuse occurred. The causes of desistance are complex and include a combination of factors, such as increased understanding by the victim that the behavior of the priest was wrong, others (often peers) finding out about the abuse, the victim removing him- or herself from the situation in which the abuse was occurring, and in some cases self-correction by the abusing priests.

### Situational Factors and Prevention Policies

- For abuse to occur, three factors must converge: there must be a person who is motivated to commit the act of abuse, there must be a potential victim, and there must be a lack of a “capable guardian.”
- Education of potential victims, potential abusers, and potential “guardians” is essential to reduce the opportunities to abuse.
- Continued outreach to priests after ordination is important in reinforcing the knowledge and understanding about human formation.
- For diocesan efforts to be accepted by the community, they must be direct and transparent, and they must become part of the conscience of the community. Only when the policies about and responses to abuse are “routine” will the community consider them to be acceptable.

### SUMMARY

The findings of the *Causes and Context* study indicate that few of the priest-abusers exhibited serious pathological, developmental, or psychological characteristics or

behaviors that could have led to their identification prior to the commission of their abusive acts. Priests who sexually abused minors did not differ significantly from other priests on psychological or intelligence tests but had vulnerabilities, intimacy deficits, and an absence of close personal relationships before and during seminary. A very small percentage of the priests who had allegations of abuse were motivated by pathological disorders such as pedophilia. The annual count of priests who exhibited pedophilic behavior does not change during the period of study; this flat, consistent pattern is the opposite of the general pattern for the majority of incidents, which increased in the 1960s and 1970s and decreased continuously from the mid-1980s.

The majority of priests who had allegations of abuse against minors were trained in national, mainstream seminaries prior to the 1970s. These seminarians had little or no exposure to a curriculum of what is now understood as “human formation”; the training in self-understanding and the development of emotional and psychological competence for a life of celibate chastity was extremely limited. Many abusers educated in early cohorts had a “confused” sexual identity; however, this was not evident in later cohorts. Social changes paralleled the increase of sexual abuse on all cohorts of priests. The incidence of abuse allegations for all pre-1980s ordination cohorts peaked in the late 1970s.

Sexual victimization of children is a serious and pervasive issue in society. It is present in families, and it is not uncommon in institutions where adults form mentoring and nurturing relationships with adolescents, including schools and religious, sports, and social organizations. This study provides a framework for understanding not only the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests, but sexual victimization of children in any institution. No other institution has undertaken a public study of sexual abuse and, as a result, there are no comparable data to those collected and reported by the Catholic Church. Other organizations should follow suit and examine the extent of sexual abuse within their groups to better understand the extent of the problem and the situations in which sexual abuse takes place. Only with such an understanding can effective prevention policies be articulated and implemented. While some sexual abuse will always occur, knowledge and understanding of this kind of exploitation of minors can limit the opportunities for abuse while also helping to identify abuse situations as early as possible.

## CHAPTER 6

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The *Causes and Context* study provided a unique opportunity to collect robust, rich, and multifaceted data on the sexual abuse of minors over a sixty-year period. Seven sources of quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed, and the findings support a consistent set of conclusions. This convergence of findings provides confidence in the data, which can then serve as a base for creating policy recommendations.

Consistent with literature about sex offenders in the general population, the *Causes and Context* data show that priests who sexually abused minors constitute a heterogeneous population. Individual characteristics do not predict that a priest will commit sexual abuse of a minor. Rather, vulnerabilities, in combination with situational stresses and opportunities, raise the risk of abuse. Like non-priest abusers, the majority of priests who sexually abused minors appear to have had certain vulnerabilities to commit abuse (for example, emotional congruence with children or adolescents), experienced increased stressors from work (for example, having recently received more responsibilities, such as becoming a pastor), and had opportunities to abuse (for example, unguarded access to minors).

Most abuse incidents occurred decades ago, at a time when the impact of victimization was not fully understood and research on sexual offenders was in early stages of development. When priests did commit abusive acts, they were often not reported by the victim at the time of the incident, not recognized by the abuser's peers or leaders, and, when known, were not dealt with in a way that helped the victim to recover from the resulting harm. The historical, psychological, organizational, cultural, and situational data analyzed here provide a vital narrative about the abuse, abusers, victims, and institutions in which abuse took place.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### Historical Nature of Abuse

- The “crisis” of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests is a historical problem. Data from multiple sources show that incidence of abuse behavior was highest between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s. Sexual abuse continues to occur, but 94 percent of the

abuse incidents reported to the Catholic Church from 1950 through 2009 took place before 1990. Each year, fewer new reports are brought forward, and each set of new cases reflects the known pattern.

- Priests ordained in different decades committed their first acts of abuse after different periods of time in ministry, but the abusive acts for all cohorts were clustered in the 1960s and 1970s. The influence of the overall pattern of social change is seen in all ordination cohorts.
- Factors that were invariant during the time period addressed, such as celibacy, were not responsible for the increase or decline in abuse cases over this time period.
- Reports of abuse are associated with periods of publicity about the problem of sexual abuse.
- Before 1985, reports of sexual abuse were most likely to be made by the parent of the youth within a year of the abuse. By the mid-1990s, reports of abuse were being made more often by adult men and women reporting abuse incidents that had happened ten or more years earlier. In 2002, reports of abuse were most often made by adult victims or their lawyers twenty to forty years after the abuse took place.

### Seminary Education and Priestly Formation

- The majority of abusers (70%) were ordained prior to the 1970s, and more abusers were educated in seminaries in the 1940s and 1950s than at any other time period.
- Human formation in seminary is critically important. The drop in abuse cases preceded the inclusion of a thorough education in human formation, but the development of the curriculum of human formation is consistent with the continued low levels of abuse by Catholic priests.
- Sexual abuse of minors was a national problem, and those who abused were educated in mainstream seminaries. No significant increase in vulnerability was evident in those who attended minor or foreign seminaries.

## Clinical and Individual Factors

- Priest-abusers are similar to sex offenders in the general population. They had some motivation to commit the abuse (for example, emotional congruence to adolescents), exhibited techniques of neutralization to excuse and justify their behavior, took advantage of opportunities to abuse (for example, through socialization with the family), and used grooming techniques to gain compliance from potential victims.
- Priest-abusers were not “pedophile priests.” The majority of priests who abused were not driven by particular pathologies, and most did not “specialize” in abuse of particular types of victims. The pathologically driven priests were not influenced by social factors as were the majority of abusers (for example, their behavior was consistent across the time period and did not peak from the mid-1960s to 1980s). “Generalists,” or indiscriminate offenders, constituted the majority of abusers and were influenced by social factors.
- The majority of abusers did not have diagnosable psychological problems. No significant psychological, personality, or IQ differences were found between priests who abused minors and those who were treated for other reasons.
- Most clergy in the clinical sample had been in sexual relationships post-ordination (77%), even if that was not the primary reason for treatment. The majority of priests referred for abuse of a minor had also had sexual behavior with adults (70%).
- Data indicate that the experience of having been sexually abused by an adult while a minor increased the risk that priests would later abuse a child.
- Sexual behavior before ordination predicted sexual behavior after ordination; however, such conduct only predicted subsequent sexual interaction with other adults, not with minors.
- The clinical data do not support the hypothesis that priests with a homosexual identity or those who committed same-sex sexual behavior with adults are significantly more likely to sexually abuse children than those with a heterosexual orientation or behavior.
- By the mid-1980s, all bishops had been made aware of the issue of sexual abuse of minors. Bishops were committed to the Five Principles, but these Principles were not consistently implemented in all dioceses. The extent of compliance with the Five Principles varied greatly across the US dioceses: some bishops undertook thoroughgoing change in their response to victims of abuse and affected parishes; other bishops limited the discussion of sexual abuse to those consultants who had commitments of confidentiality.
- Diocesan leaders responded to acts of abuse, but with a focus on the priests and not the victims. Many bishops acted in good faith to help abusive priests, most often by sending the priest-abusers to treatment. There was no clear indication, however, of the bishops’ or other diocesan leaders’ understanding of the extent of harm resulting from sexual abuse. Although this lack of understanding was consistent with the overall lack of understanding of victimization at the time, the absence of acknowledgment of harm was a significant ethical lapse on the part of leadership in some dioceses.
- “Insiders” were engaged, but “outsiders” were rebuffed; information about sexual abuse within the Catholic Church was tightly controlled. This pattern led individuals and groups outside the church, including victim advocates, to call for a greater response and more transparency about the response to abuse claims.
- Some diocesan leaders were “innovators” who led the organizational change to address the problems of sexual abuse of minors. However, some were also “laggards,” or were slow to respond to organizational changes. The media often focused on the laggards, even though they constituted a minority of diocesan leaders, which further perpetuated the image that the bishops as a whole were not responding to the problem of sexual abuse of minors.
- It is the voices and narratives of victims that have confronted priests, enabled dioceses to act responsibly, and brought diocesan leaders to an understanding of the harm of abuse.

## Organizational Responses to Abuse

- Diocesan responses to abusive priests changed substantially over the sixty-year period addressed in this study. For example, abusive priests were less likely to be returned to active ministry and/or more likely to be placed on administrative leave during the later years. Bishops and other diocesan leaders experienced confusion about or difficulty with available options (for example, suspension, laicization, reinstatement) for permanently removing abusive priests from ministry.

## Onset, Persistence, and Desistance from Abuse

- Most abuse incidents were not reported or recognized at the time they occurred, even when the abusers had lengthy histories of abusive behavior. This lacuna led to a substantial delay in the knowledge about individual incidents of abuse and the scope of the problem in the Catholic Church.
- Access to victims played a critical role in victim choice. Few significant differences were found between

the locations and situations in which boys and girls were abused, but priests had more access to boys until recently (primarily because parishes permitted girls as altar servers only after 1983).

- Priests who abused minors exhibited behavior consistent with non-priest abusers regarding grooming behaviors (onset), techniques of neutralization (persistence), and internal and external desistance mechanisms.
- Priests who abused minors at the peak of the crisis exhibited characteristics consistent with “situational” child abusers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTION POLICIES

The heterogeneity of the priest-abuser population presents a complex agenda for prevention. It is not possible to identify most potential abusers with traditional psychological assessments, because very few priest-abusers were driven to commit their offenses by diagnosable psychological disorders. It is also neither possible nor desirable to implement extensive restrictions on the mentoring and nurturing relationships between minors and priests given that most priests have not sexually abused minors and are not likely to do so. However, it is critical to implement prevention policies that are independent of a particular risk factor, be they social, psychological, or developmental factors. Prevention policies should focus on three factors: education, situational prevention models, and oversight and accountability.

### Education

The human formation component as part of the seminary education program evolved over the period of time studied, and data show that this development reduced the vulnerability of priests to abuse. The addition of elements of what is now called a “Human Formation” component of seminary education was recognized as valuable by priests in the study and was consistent with the decline in sexual abuse incidents. In the survey of priests with allegations of abuse compared to those without allegations of abuse, the experience of some human formation education was a critical factor in distinguishing the two groups. The findings of the *Causes and Context* study should be digested and used as the basis for a mandatory curriculum for a workshop for all seminary faculty.

A long-neglected function at the diocesan level is the provision of continuing education for priests. In 2001, the US bishops prepared *The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests*, intended primarily for diocesan priesthood. The plan provides a general description of the kinds of ongoing formation needed to enhance the integration of

priestly identity and the tasks of pastoral ministry; it also outlines formation at different stages of priesthood and discusses some of the practical possibilities for formation.

To implement such programs, bishops would need to provide the human and financial resources needed to ensure that ongoing formation is available. Also pressing is the question of the judicious deployment of priests that would make possible opportunities for some to take sabbaticals or in other ways renew themselves and their ministry. Beyond these concerns, priests have varying degrees of interest to participate in such programs. For reasons of excessive workloads, lack of money, or other personal factors, not all choose to engage in ongoing formation. Many pastors believe bishops must support, even make obligatory, some form of continuing education if parish life is to thrive.

A clear delineation of behavioral expectations appropriate to a life of celibacy must be part of formation goals during seminary education and also throughout priests’ time in ministry. The *Causes and Context* data indicate that abuse is most likely to occur at times of stress, loneliness, and isolation. Such stressful or challenging situations triggered the desire in some priests to form inappropriate relationships with others—such relationships were most often with adults, but sometimes with minors. The addition of formal educational models related to human formation would be one step toward reducing the likelihood of abuse at times in which priests are most vulnerable. This formation should include a thorough understanding of the major findings of this study. Toward that end, educational opportunities should be put in place, for example, workshops and online courses, for those responsible for the human formation programs for seminarians, including seminary administrators and faculty.

### Situational Prevention Models

The peak of sexual abuse incidents in the Catholic Church occurred at a time of social upheaval, and it is possible that other social factors could influence harmful behavior in the future. Prevention models take into account that new opportunities will arise and that over time offenders will adapt and change their modus operandi. In this respect it is important to apply situational prevention strategies that incorporate a general framework—all events can be analyzed situationally, and new techniques (for example, intervention strategies) can be implemented to prevent abuse. According to SCP models, this can be accomplished in five ways:

- *Increase the effort* by making it more difficult for priests to commit acts of abuse. The church has already taken an important step in accomplishing this goal by

implementing mandatory safe environment training programs. In doing so, the church is educating potential victims (minors), potential abusers (priests), and guardians (those in the church—parents or other community members—who may witness, be told about, or become aware of abuse should it occur).

- *Increase the risks* by making it more likely that those who commit acts of abuse will be identified and, once recognized, have more to lose. The safe environment training programs help to increase the risk of getting “caught” (by educating potential victims and guardians), and the “zero-tolerance” policy for abusers makes the risk greater if one is recognized as an abuser. Dioceses should institute periodic evaluation of the performance of their priests, an established element of most complex organizations. By regularly surveying priests, administrative staff, and parishioners about their responses to, and satisfaction with, the priests with whom they have contact, dioceses are more likely to be alerted to questionable behavior that might have been undetected in the past. By sending a clear signal to all members of a parish community that their responses to individual priests are valuable, diocesan leaders open avenues of communication and gain early notice of problems.
- *Reduce the rewards* by providing alternate outlets for close bonds with others. Reducing the need for priests to develop social bonds with adolescents they are mentoring is likely to reduce the levels of abuse. Priests should have outlets to form social friendships and suitable bonds with age-appropriate persons.
- *Reduce provocations* by reducing the factors that may lead priests to abuse (such as stress). This improved situation can be achieved in a variety of ways, such as offering stress-reduction seminars after transitions into a new parish and requiring ongoing formation education. Currently, newly ordained priests may have only a few years of experience as associates before becoming pastors with responsibility for a parish. Providing more opportunities for the development of administrative and financial planning skills and more time to participate in priest support groups would decrease the likelihood of isolation and stress.
- *Remove excuses* through education about what types of behavior are and are not appropriate with minors. It is necessary to reduce the ability of priests to use techniques of neutralization, whereby they excuse and justify their behavior. It is critical not only to educate priests about the harm of abuse to victims but also to continue to do so once they have been ordained. Techniques of neutralization often develop over time and after periods of stress or other negative experiences in

work and life; continued discourse about appropriate forms of closeness to others is critical throughout the life of the priest.

The church has taken many of the steps necessary to reduce opportunities for abuse, which should be maintained and continually evaluated for efficacy. Many individuals who enter the priesthood will have vulnerabilities that, if not addressed, may lead to a higher risk of abuse. It is important not only to address some of these vulnerabilities in seminary but also to offer post-ordination education, training, and evaluation. Knowing that most potential abusers will not be identified before the abuse occurs, and knowing that many priests have vulnerabilities that may lead to the commission of deviant behavior, it is important to reduce the opportunities for abuse to occur. The church has taken an important step in risk reduction through the safe environment education programs; post-ordination education and evaluation can also play a role in further reducing the possibility of abuse.

### Oversight and Accountability

The Catholic Church has undergone an organizational change regarding how it responds to sexual abuse of minors by priests. However, this change is not yet complete. Organizational change often takes decades and requires not only “buy in” from those involved in the organization but also that changes become routine. Such changes can be achieved only through transparency in reporting and dealing with sexual abuse; with continued transparency and accountability mechanisms in place, changes can become institutionalized.

In general, change must come from the leaders of organizations, and the case of the Catholic Church is no different. Pope Benedict XVI’s recent and highly publicized support for accountability and transparency regarding abuse victims and hierarchical neglect should encourage Catholic dioceses to continue to complete their innovation in response to, and prevention of, sexual abuse of minors. Moving through the development of such innovation requires a number of steps, including:

- The acknowledgement of “a performance gap,” leading to a specific and public timeline for the implementation of structures of accountability and transparency. The church has already taken this step through implementation of the Dallas *Charter* in 2002.
- The more efficient matching of diocesan agenda with accountability and transparency structures. The church has partially achieved this step by introducing the safe environment and audit programs and through gaining a better grasp of the problem by commissioning two studies about the sexual abuse problem.

- A more continuous redefining/restructuring of response mechanisms as dioceses reformulate accountability-transparency structures for their own geographical and subcultural contexts. This process must be ongoing, especially at the diocesan level in order to address local factors.
- As dioceses better implement structures encouraged by Pope Benedict XVI, they can be expected to engage in ongoing acts of clarifying their meaning to church members. This process must be ongoing and given serious attention since it is one that is difficult to achieve. Because cases of sexual abuse of minors continue to be reported and the community does not fully understand the temporal distribution of sexual abuse incidents over the last sixty years, it appears to some that sexual abuse is still at peak levels. This lag in understanding will require continued education of the community about these issues and about the church's commitment to respond to such reports.
- Finally, the transparency/accountability innovations of the Five Principles will achieve some degree of routinization; that is, they will have become institutionalized as part of the ordinary practice and culture of the diocese. This state of affairs has not yet been realized. To achieve this final stage of innovation, diocesan leaders must incorporate the response to sexual abuse as part of ordinary practice and culture.

### DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The *Causes and Context* study results suggest a number of directions for further research that would contribute to our understanding of the harms of sexual abuse. The impact of the recognition and disclosure of sexual abuse, experienced while a minor but reported many years after it occurred, is not yet well understood. The individual needs of those victims of abuse are varied and have been met in differing degrees. The substantial impact of media on the reporting of sexual abuse may be specific to the subject or the current period in American history, or, alternatively, may be a typical result of publicity about any form of harm to or hazard for persons. The aspiration to organizational transparency with respect to deviance by the organization's

members is a late twentieth-century movement: it is unclear how much development will take place. Finally, the effect of the financial impact of settlements and the results of litigation based on sexual abuse by priests will not be fully measureable until more time has passed.

### CONCLUSION

The Catholic Church has taken serious steps toward understanding and reducing the problem of sexual abuse of minors by priests. Diocesan leaders began these discussions as a body in the mid-1980s when the problem of sexual abuse was becoming known, but actions to address the behavior at that time were inconsistent. In 2002, at the height of discourse relative to the crisis, the bishops signed a charter committing to study the problem, address it, and implement policies to prevent it from occurring in the future. They are continuing through the model of organizational change and are on their way to implementing what are considered to be best practices in terms of education about abuse for potential victims, potential abusers, and potential guardians. The church has responded to the crisis, and as a result, a substantial decrease in the number of sexual abuse cases has come about at present. However, handling the crisis within the organization, with a lack of transparency to outsiders who also were trying to understand and respond to the crisis, led to cynicism about the church's response, even though the response was consistent with both the understanding of victimization at the time and also with typical organizational response to deviant behavior.

It is intended that this research, as presented in this report, will support the desire for long-standing change expressed by many victims and those affected by this crisis. It is also intended that the findings be useful to other organizations, for child sexual abuse is not a phenomenon unique to the Catholic Church. It is a pervasive and persistent problem that can often be found in organizations in which mentoring and nurturing relationships develop between adults and young people. It is hoped that this report will further assist other institutions in understanding this serious social problem and that many will undertake an assessment of their own policies in order to prevent abuse of the young people therein.