



Archdiocese of Dubuque

## Office for Protection of Children

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In 2011, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York released the results of a landmark study which examined the causes and context of the clergy sexual abuse crisis in the U.S. Catholic Church. The report concluded that there was no single cause or predictor of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy and that situational factors and opportunity to abuse played a significant role in the onset and continuation of abusive acts.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops prepared the following statement outlining the key points of the John Jay study. The full report can be accessed at [www.usccb.org/ocyp](http://www.usccb.org/ocyp)

1. **Most abuse occurred in the 1960s and 1970s.** No single factor led priests to abuse. The increased frequency of abuse is consistent with the patterns of increased deviance of society during the 1960s and 1970s. The social influences intersected with vulnerabilities of individual priests whose preparation for celibacy was inadequate.
2. **There has been a huge decline in sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clerics.** More than 90 percent of the known cases of sexual abuse of minors occurred more than 20 years ago. The Catholic Church is no longer in the middle of a sexual abuse “crisis.” Statistical analyses show that most newly reported cases today are based on abuse that took place decades ago.
3. **Approximately four percent of priests had allegations of abuse from 1950-2002.** That percentage seems to remain the same now given that most allegations that surfaced after 2002 were allegations against priests who had already been accused. Since 2002, there have been about 500 men ordained annually and abuse is quite rare among men ordained in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is no evidence that priests abuse at higher rates than men in the general population or in any other groups.
4. **Celibacy is not to blame.** Abuse increased in the 1960s and then declined in the 1980s. Commitment to celibacy was constant over that time period. Also, most sex offenders in society are not celibate clergy. Most are married or in another relationship with an adult.
5. **Most offending priests are not pedophiles,** a group defined as having intense, recurring, sexually arousing fantasies about prepubescent children. The more likely victim of abuse by an offending cleric has been an adolescent. Pedophilia, even among clergy offenders, is rare.
6. **This is not a homosexual issue.** John Jay reports that while the majority of youth abused by clergy were boys (81 percent), no evidence exists to suggest that sexual orientation by itself contributes to sex crimes against children. This is a crime of opportunity.

7. **Even before 2002, most bishops who learned of an allegation of abuse addressed it.** Responses included administrative leave, assessment and psychological treatment. Often in the 1980s and 1990s, clergy abusers were treated and returned to ministry when “rehabilitated.” Claims of the efficacy of psychological treatment were not unusual then. Few priests were removed from the priesthood until recently because laicization required consent from the Vatican and/or cumbersome canonical procedures. Treatment and reinstatement were complicated also because when priests had multiple allegations of abuse, not all of the allegations were known before the priest was returned to ministry.
8. **The Catholic Church is a safe place for children.** Almost all of the cases discussed in the press today are from the 1960s through early 1980s. Both John Jay studies showed that cases of sexual abuse by priests decreased dramatically starting in the early to mid 1980s. 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.
9. **The Catholic Church has taken steps so that a sexual abuse crisis does not happen again.** All Church workers (including priests, volunteers and parents) must go through safe environment training and virtually all dioceses are audited yearly by an independent, secular 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 – an unprecedented self-scrutiny, unique among child-serving institutions in the United States, whether religious or secular.