

Preface and Acknowledgements

John Jay College of Criminal Justice was honored to have been asked by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to undertake the critically important task of obtaining a comprehensive description of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests. From the beginning, the college well understood its profound responsibility: to describe the dimensions of the abuse problem as accurately and completely as possible, to be scrupulously objective in carrying out the study, and to report the facts in an honest, forthright manner. The gravity of the assignment entrusted to the college cannot be over-estimated.

Some advised the college to reject the request to do the study: it was too controversial; it was too complicated; it could expose the college to lawsuits; and it could engender negative publicity. After listening carefully to this counsel, I came to the conclusion that despite the problems which might arise, the college had a civic obligation to use its resources and academic talent to help provide facts about the sexual abuse phenomenon which has been such a sad chapter in the history of the Catholic Church. Because it is a significant part of the college's stated mission to engage in research dealing with public safety, I became convinced that we would be shirking our duty if we turned down the opportunity to do research on the victimization of children which hopefully will help protect them in years to come.

The administrators, faculty and students invited to participate in this endeavor shared my conviction. They committed themselves to making the study a high priority, to immersing themselves in the many tasks which had to be done, and to maintaining the highest level of professionalism in carrying out the sensitive mandate entrusted to us. This was a "fast-track" project, taking less than a year from start to finish, but the faculty nevertheless faithfully adhered to the established norms of research ethics at every step along the way.

The findings presented in this report are very disturbing. As we at John Jay College pored over the data, we were deeply moved by the recitation of the large numbers of offenses committed against children and the seriousness of their nature. But we are genuinely hopeful that out of this excruciating inquiry will emerge not only a better understanding of the abuse problem but a series of sensible, effective measures to reduce the possibility that other children will suffer the kinds of abuses which we have uncovered.

I would like to thank the many men and women of good will without whose cooperation this study would have been impossible to accomplish. I thank with special gratitude the many Catholic bishops across the country who provided us in record time the detailed, revealing data from their files. The remarkable 98 per cent response rate which we obtained from the dioceses is virtually unheard of in social science research. The National Review Board, all of whose lay members have very demanding responsibilities, worked with us endlessly as we met the various challenges that confronted us on an almost daily basis. I must also acknowledge my deep appreciation of the efforts of Dr. Kathleen McChesney, Executive Director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and her staff who repeatedly walked the extra mile to help us complete our assignment.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the staff at John Jay College who facilitated the work of the team doing the study. Everything including finding space for the project

office, installation of computers, providing logistical support for meetings, and printing of this report in record time happened because many individuals pitched in. This was truly a collective endeavor of the college, and as president I would like to thank each and every person who contributed to this historic social science research project.

The data which John Jay College collected will provide the basis for the development of hypotheses and analyses which explain the causes of the distressing sexual abuse phenomenon presented in this report. Even more important, it is my fervent hope that the facts which the John Jay study presents will ultimately work to prevent recurrence of such victimization of children in the future.

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