

# Just One Jesuit:

*Communities' Accounts of the Effects  
of Clergy Abuse Through the Lens of a  
Singular Priest's Mission Activities*

Julia Feder, PhD

Heather Fryer, PhD

Rebecca Murray, PhD



## Acknowledgments

**THIS STUDY WAS FUNDED** by a generous grant from Fordham University as part of *Taking Responsibility: Jesuit Educational Institutions Confront the Causes and Legacy of Sexual Abuse*. Co-sponsored by Fordham's Department of Theology and Francis and Ann Curran Center for American Catholic Studies, *Taking Responsibility* advances research regarding the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable persons in Jesuit institutions of education. Key goals for the grant include:

1. support for rigorous, focused investigations into aspects of clerical sexual abuse as they have manifested at Jesuit institutions;
2. the production of resources aimed at assisting Jesuit administrators, faculty, staff, students, and others to examine the causes, history, and consequences of sexual abuse, as well as ethical considerations about our responsibility in the present day;
3. the facilitation of ongoing conversation, including through regular online and offline meetings for consultation and study and a major conference in Spring 2022; and
4. the development of a partner network of Jesuit educational institutions through which this work can continue.

More information about *Taking Responsibility* and projects at other Jesuit institutions [can be found here](#).

**WE ARE GRATEFUL** to Fordham and all sponsors of *Taking Responsibility* for supporting our project. Our thanks go to the *Taking Responsibility* leadership team: Dr. Bradford Hinze, Dr. Christine Firer Hinze, Dr. Patrick Hornbeck, and Dr. Michael E. Lee. Special thanks also go to the project's amazing coordinator, Dr. Catherine Osborne, who encouraged this project from the very beginning and project director, Dr. John Seitz, whose continued support has enabled us to communicate our findings to new audiences.

**OUR DEEPEST GRATITUDE** goes to those survivors, alumni, Jesuit educators, and Omaha community members we interviewed for this project. Your insights were invaluable and your vulnerability is a gift to those who follow after you.

**WE ARE EQUALLY GRATEFUL** to Daniel S. Hendrickson, SJ, Creighton University's President, and Nicholas Santos, SJ, Rector of the Omaha Jesuit community, whose early support for this project made it possible. We are grateful to the experts who we consulted for background knowledge as we crafted our lines of inquiry: Terry McKiernan, Dr. Robert Orsi, Dr. Stephanie Krehbiel, Maka Black Elk, Dr. John Seitz, and Dr. Kathleen Holscher. We give thanks to Dr. Kathleen Cummings, Dr. Peter Cajka, and others from the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism at the University of Notre Dame who invited us to participate in a generative set of scholarly conversations as part of their "Gender, Sex, and Power: Toward a History of Clergy Abuse in the US Catholic Church" project and to Dr. Kimberly Belcher and Dr. David Clairmont who featured some of this research in an early form at their "Accountability, Healing, and Trust" conference at the University of Notre Dame. We give thanks as well to St. Pius X Catholic Church in Omaha who invited us to present our findings in a pastoral context. We are grateful for Dr. Daniel Horan, Dr. Jessica Coblentz, Dr. Jennifer Beste, Dr. Susan Calef, Dr. Britta McEwen, Dr. Elizabeth Cooke, and Dr. Elizabeth Elliott-Meisel who provided invaluable feedback as our research progressed and to Dr. Kathy Lilla Cox, Dr. Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, Dr. Donna Freitas, and Dr. Rachel Wheeler who offered feedback on this report. Finally, we are grateful to Dr. Paul Schutz for his stellar design work on this report.

## About the Authors

**Julia Feder, PhD** is a Catholic systematic theologian. She is the assistant director of the Center for the Study of Spirituality and associate professor of religious studies and theology at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana. She is the author of [Incarnating Grace: A Theology of Healing from Sexual Trauma](#) (Fordham University Press, 2024).

**Heather Fryer, PhD** is an independent scholar who served on the faculty of the History Department at Creighton University from 2004-2021. Her publications on the social history of the American West include [Perimeters of Democracy: Inverse Utopias at the Wartime Social Landscape in the American West](#) (University of Nebraska Press, 2010) and the documentary film [Shinmachi: Stronger Than a Tsunami](#) (American Public Television, airing on PBS from 2019-2024). She is past editor of *Peace & Change: a Journal of Peace Research*.

**Rebecca Murray, PhD** is a professor of criminal justice and an associate dean at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. Her works include effects of urban structures on crime, wrongful convictions and victim advocacy, and she has published works in journals such as *Criminal Justice Review*, *Contemporary Justice Review* and *Crime and Delinquency*. She founded the Nebraska Victim Assistance Academy through a U.S. Federal Grant awarded from the Justice Department's Office for Victims of Crime.

# Table of Contents

1	<b>Executive Summary</b>
3	<b>Introduction to the Research</b>
6	<b>Methods &amp; Data</b>
9	<b>Spotlight on Survivor Narratives</b>
10	Survivor Narrative #1—Little Herbie
12	Survivor Narrative #2—Ryan
15	<b>Provisional Conclusions</b>
19	<b>Recommendations for Ministerial Formation &amp; Training</b>



## **Executive Summary**



**DANIEL KENNEY, S.J. (1932-2022)** entered the Jesuits in 1950 and was assigned to teach theology at Creighton Preparatory School (hereafter “Creighton Prep” or “Prep”), a prestigious Jesuit high school for boys in Omaha, Nebraska, after completing his studies in 1965. Kenney gained a high public profile during his 24 years at Creighton Prep. Known for his charisma and commitment to the development of children’s potential, Kenney raised the funds for two programs for children that continue in the present. Operation Others, founded in 1968, mobilizes students in every Catholic high school to distribute food to children and families in need during the holidays. Camp Buford, operating today as “Go Beyond,” is a summer camp that gives economically disadvantaged children a wilderness immersion on a piece of land Kenney acquired in western Wyoming. Camp Buford reflects one of the hallmarks of Kenney’s public persona; the Omaha press referred to Kenney as “the Monkey Priest” for the monkey hand puppet named Buford that accompanied Kenney everywhere as an emblem of his interest in children and the quirkiness that cast an endearing image.

In 1989, officials at Creighton Prep dismissed Kenney in response to a credible accusation of sexual abuse of a Prep student. After a brief reassignment to Church of the Gesu on the Marquette University campus, where he maintained relationships with Prep graduates in the student body, Kenney was placed on sabbatical at Red Cloud Indian School in Pine Ridge, South Dakota for five months. The Jesuits put Kenney on a long-term assignment at Holy Family Basilica in Nairobi, Kenya where he lived for 10 years as a founder of a substance abuse treatment program. The Jesuits removed Kenney from public ministry in 2003. Kenney remained in Jesuit housing until his death in 2022, where he lived under restrictions that included not identifying himself as a priest, not wearing a Roman collar, and not appearing unaccompanied in public. Multiple unconfirmed reports state that Kenney was barred from entering the boundaries of the Archdiocese of Omaha, though he was the guest of honor at a fundraising dinner for Operation Others in 2000. After Kenney’s initial dismissal from Prep, seven other former Creighton Prep students have reported being sexually abused by Kenney while students—in most cases as incoming freshmen. The Midwest Jesuits deemed these allegations to be credible. Kenney was laicized without announcement or explanation in 2020.

Since 2018, when the Omaha Archdiocese and the Midwest Jesuits notified the public that Kenney was credibly accused of the sexual abuse of a minor, seven additional former Creighton Prep students reported instances of sexual misconduct by Kenney to the *Omaha World Herald*. Kenney neither admitted to nor denied the allegations against him, but maintained that producing evidence of abuse would be impossible. Kenney never faced criminal charges.

**OUR STUDY STEMMED FROM QUESTIONS** about the number of people who lived with unacknowledged and unhealed wounds from Kenney’s abuse and the enduring impact of these injuries on their adult lives. We soon found that vast swaths of the Omaha public and its substantial Catholic community who saw exposure, scandal, and the rehabilitation of Daniel Kenney’s image, without seeing justice and healing for survivors who also carry some effects of Kenney’s abuse. The Midwest Jesuits’ and Creighton Prep’s focus on “moving forward” from what it has constructed as a “prior era” of clergy sexual abuse threatens a corrosive impact across multiple sectors of the Omaha community. As the school for Omaha’s religious and secular leadership, Creighton Preparatory School plays a central role in shaping Omaha’s society, culture, and collective memory.

Therefore, Kenney’s case is not about “just one Jesuit,” but about a radiating web of victim/survivors, secondary victims (survivors’ parents and non-victimized classmates), bystanders, and the involuntary and voluntary protectors of Kenney and his image as “the Monkey Priest.” What began as a study of the

lingering impacts of the Kenney case on student and alumni wellbeing at Creighton Prep evolved into a study of the longevity and impact of its unanswered questions. Naming Kenney as a credibly accused priest limited his access to Creighton Prep students and circumscribed his role within the Jesuit community. Yet naming Kenney's misconduct has not restored the balance of power between victim/survivors and their perpetrators, nor has it catalyzed the cultural or systemic changes necessary to respond to the injuries inflicted by clergy sexual abuse. Daniel Kenney's case is not unique. His case maps to a three-part pattern that is paradigmatic in cases of clergy sexual abuse in the Catholic Church: an offending priest has a pattern of abuse that is only addressed under pressure from an outside authority (in Kenney's case, this was a parent); the offending priest is moved to another location with just as much access to minors, usually in more marginalized communities; over time, the offending priest is shielded from consequences by the shift in attention to his impressive fundraising, public projects, or candor about a different struggle (in Kenney's case, this was recovery from alcoholism). Jesuit education, in its holistic approach to developing "people for and with others," depends upon ensuring students' physical, emotional, social, and spiritual safety. It asks students and their families to engage in close mentoring relationships that enable profound learning experiences. For this reason, a deeper examination of Kenney's case may shed light on broader patterns of clergy sexual abuse at Jesuit institutions that go undetected in other frameworks.

Participants in our semi-structured interviews independently corroborated documented evidence that clergy sexual abuse cannot be reduced to "just one" person, place, or phenomenon. Nor can clergy sexual abuse be corralled behind institutionally constructed markers of "the past." The Kenney case, which officially came to an end in 1989, is as resonant in Omaha as ever. And it has revealed seven enduring phenomena of the clergy sexual abuse crisis of "the past" that persist in the present: 1) the broad systemic nature of abuser networks; 2) absence of language and practices to construct healthy masculinities; 3) compartmentalization of clergy sexual abuse within the Church that obscures the part that secular authorities and community members played wittingly and unwittingly in protecting abusers; 4) practices of profiling which create a false sense of security that priests with especially conservative or progressive politics are immune from perpetrating acts of abuse; 5) practices of "open dialogue" about some aspects of clergy sexual abuse that close off conversation about others; 6) enduring wounds borne by bystanders and those in the broader Omaha community; 7) survivors' breadth of harm beyond legal definitions of abuse.





# **Introduction to the Research**



**THE JUST ONE JESUIT RESEARCH PROJECT** aimed to uncover this “one Jesuit’s” methods of abuse, but also how Kenney maintained admiration and trust within Creighton Preparatory School and the broader Omaha community for years after a credible allegation of abuse was brought to light. From 2021 to 2024, our team of one theologian, one criminologist, and one historian—all current or former Jesuit educators at Creighton University—undertook a systematic review of public documents, archival records, and conducted 21 interviews with survivors, Omaha community members, alumni of Creighton Preparatory School, and colleagues of Kenney in order to better understand the broader context of clergy sexual abuse in Omaha (and beyond) at Jesuit Catholic institutions in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. We discovered that over these three decades of rapid social change Kenney made a point of accompanying boys who didn’t fit the mold of the “Creighton Prep student”—exemplars of masculinity who displayed athleticism, affluence, and had a visibly stable home life. Kenney reached out to students who had experienced significant traumas or disruptive events to administer spiritual ‘healing’—an intimate interaction that Kenney used to select prospective targets for abuse.

When we began this project, we had a hunch that examining one perpetrator would give us insight into the actions and impact of others. Our team was surprised to discover that six other credibly accused priests taught coterminously with Kenney, at various points in his 24 years at Creighton Prep. Survivors that we interviewed were aware that there were multiple perpetrators on the faculty and staff, some even reported collaboration between these priests to grant each other access to minors during the school day for private confession (or other private opportunities for abuse). Though it is unclear whether each priest knew what the others were doing, there is evidence of an acknowledged culture of permissible perpetration and victim-blaming at Creighton Prep. One survivor reported to the *Omaha World Herald* that, he was reprimanded by the dean of discipline at Creighton Prep in the 1980s for “allowing” Ken-

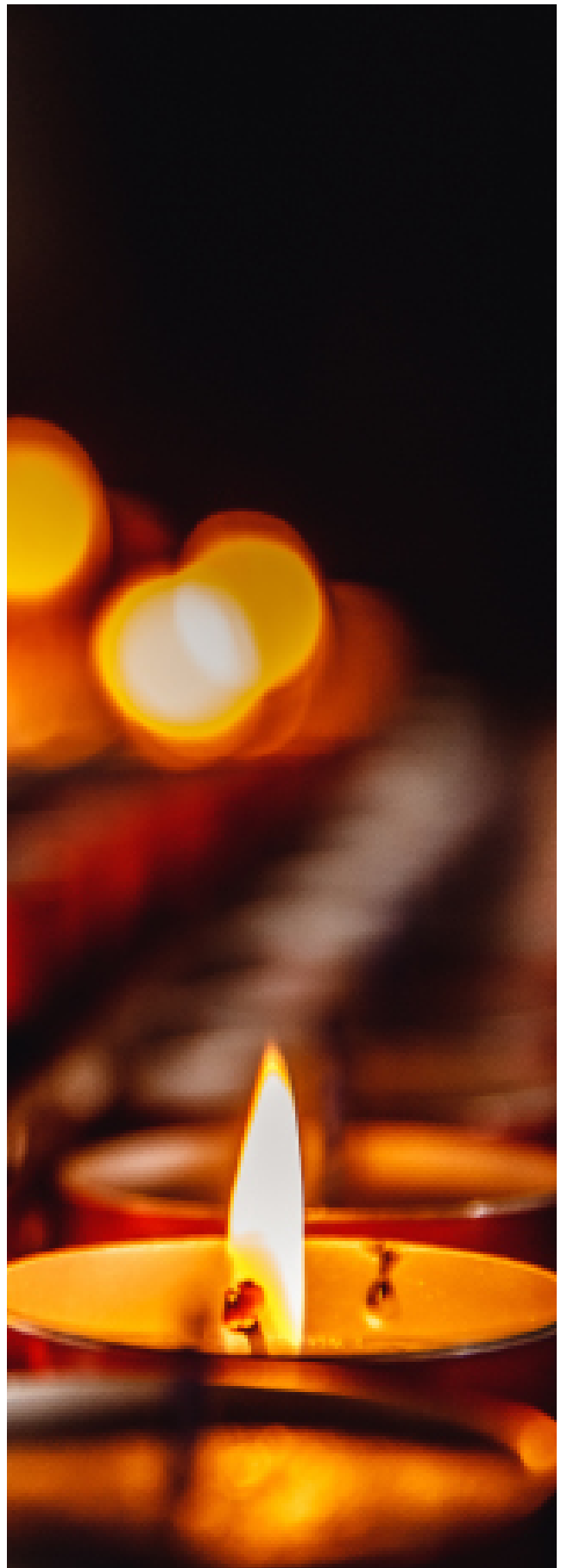
ney to pull him out of class for a private Confession, who shamed him by asking “Don’t you know better than to hang out with a guy like that?” This suggests that even before Kenney was removed from Creighton Prep, some adults in positions of authority knew that he could not safely be left alone with minors. These findings raise additional questions about who knew about Kenney’s abuse before he was removed from Creighton Prep in 1989 and how they responded to the knowledge that students were in danger of abuse.

Because of our professional and social location in Nebraska, our research team focused its initial research on Kenney’s time in Omaha. The Institutional Review Board at Creighton University made this focus into a constraint by specifically prohibiting data collection on Kenney’s placements in South Dakota or Kenya. As a result of this constraint, we are unable to investigate one interviewee’s report that the Jesuits terminated Kenney’s assignment in Kenya in 2003 following an accusation that he sexually abused at least one person there. Although we are not able to confirm this report, we can read it as an indication that further research into the Kenney case is necessary to accurately measure the extent to which Kenney’s abuses, and institutional responses to Kenney’s abuses, continue to affect individuals and communities where he was invested with authority and trust. Kenney’s placements at Red Cloud Indian School (with very high rates of child sexual abuse) and Holy Family Basilica (where Kenney would have continued contact with minors) are the least well documented and among the most concerning.

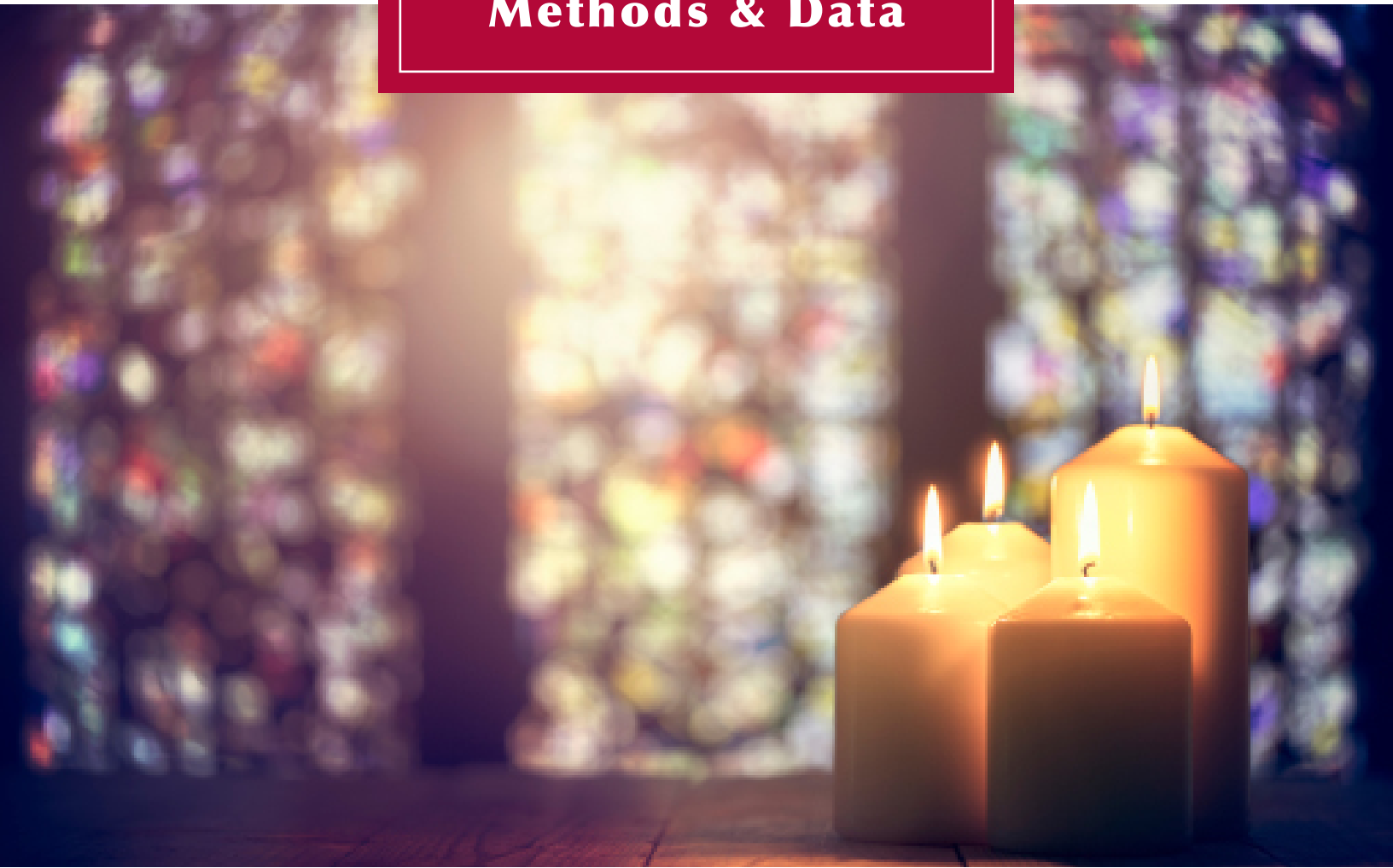
**IT HAS BEEN TWO DECADES** since the USC-CB put the Dallas Charter into effect. While the effects of its provisions are a matter of debate, the Charter has done the important work of calling out the pervasiveness of clergy sexual abuse and of making the protection of children a priority. It was of such great importance that priests and members of church staff would for the first time be subject to scrutiny and sanctions for grooming and other abusive behaviors. As significant as this is, the Dallas Charter (and subsequent revisions)



has notable limitations. It confines responsibility for abuse to priests and others who are “credibly accused.” It envisions clergy sexual abuse as a narrow act of interpersonal violence between one perpetrator and one victim. It retains remnants of the Church’s outdated understanding that sexual abuse is triggered by the particulars of the abuser’s location and situation, and not from behaviors originating from the abusers themselves. Most significantly, the Charter offers best practices for the protection of children without a deeper analysis of the institutional slippages that set the stage for the abuse and the “near-miss” incidents of abuse of minors. In short, students in Jesuit schools are safer than they were before the implementation of the Dallas Charter, but more work can be done to ensure that students’ wellbeing is protected.



## **Methods & Data**



**THE RESEARCH ENGAGED** several qualitative research methodologies to address what happened before, during, and after Kenney's tenure at Creighton Prep. This mixed methods, multi-perspectival approach enabled us to identify patterns, continuities, and structural issues that extend beyond one perpetrator and one school. We also employed an expanded definition of "suffering from Kenney's abuse" to include students who sustained incidents of abuse as well as those who suffered secondary trauma and moral injuries as a result of Kenney's actions. This definition provided a framework for accounting for injuries outside of prescribed legal definitions of "abuse" and prescribed time markers between the past and present. Moreover, it registered how people perceived their injuries during and since Kenney's departure. To achieve a full and nuanced fund of data, we engaged in the following research methods:

#### *A Public Records Review*

**DESPITE THE FACT** that there were no criminal (or civil, that we are aware) charges filed against Daniel Kenney, there were a considerable number of newspaper and other public records about him, given his relatively high-profile status as a savvy fundraiser and social figure in the Omaha community. A close reading of reports published in the *Omaha World Herald* (the local paper of record) along with interviews with journalists familiar with Kenney provided information about how the Kenney case was presented to the Omaha public. A survey of Creighton Prep yearbooks from his tenure provided by alumni (the school was unwilling to allow us to access their yearbooks and school papers) provided information about how the school represented itself and its fraternal culture and enabled us to gather data on when and how Kenney was pictured. Public statements sent to stakeholders from Creighton Prep as well as relevant sections of the Creighton Prep Handbook's reporting requirements formed a picture of the school's response to the breaking news about Kenney and archdiocesan directories indicated who was in local Catholic leadership over the course of Kenney's assignment at Creighton Prep. Reading

these public records as a corpus provided information regarding when statements were released, the timing and content of newspaper articles, and the tenure of other credibly accused priests who shared space with Daniel Kenney during his time at the high school. This grounded our research questions in the continuities, silences, and disjunctures in the record.

#### *Archival Research*

**THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE JESUIT PROVINCES** in 2014, collapsing from ten to four, meant that information from the Wisconsin Province, which had held archives from Omaha, was merged with the Chicago-Detroit Province to form the Midwest Province. All records are now kept in St. Louis, where we obtained access to all relevant records that were available to us. Here, we were able to glean some information regarding site visits from Provincial authorities, provincial directories as well as some general information about Creighton Prep. The Jesuit Archives & Research Center access policy restricts many materials for a period of fifty years following their creation, which meant we were not able to access files regarding Kenney himself.

#### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

**USING A COMBINATION** of snowball sampling and social media outreach our team conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with Creighton Prep alumni, former administrators, community members and survivors. These extremely informative interviews, which averaged anywhere from 45 minutes to nearly 2 hours, provided a rich source of data to draw from in forming our conclusions.

#### *Assessment of Participation Refusal*

**IN QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH**, studying or assessing error rate is critical to determine whether the data that one has is substantively different from the data that one may be missing. We tracked sources of data that were not made available to us, whether due to restrictions on archival work, re-

fusals to do interviews or efforts to outright block our efforts. This was particularly illuminating for this research, as we were able to track the demographics of individuals who declined our request for an interview and to compare their reasons for their refusals. As this can be tricky with voluntary research, we were careful not to keep personally identifiable data on refusals, and it is important to note that we did not solicit individual survivors, but only approached individuals with a request if their name was suggested by another interviewee, or if they held a role that would have put them in direct proximity with Daniel Kenney (such as colleagues or administrators) or were important to the institutional processes of Creighton Prep or the Jesuits. Most refusals came from individuals who maintained ties to the Jesuits in some way.



## **Spotlight on Survivor Narratives**



**KENNEY TARGETED FRESHMEN** and sexually exploited them in the context of the Sacrament of Penance (also known as Confession). At the time, Confession was largely not face-to-face but rather behind a screen. But Kenney administered Confession outside of the traditional confessional in regular rooms (called “counseling rooms”) without any barrier between himself and the young person he spoke with. As suggested by one interviewee, Kenney may have thought—or, at least, part of him may have thought—that he was helping these young people to sexually mature by making the sacrament intimate and personal. But, as one colleague remarked, “He [really] was using that sacrament for his own development, or experience, or pleasure, or I don’t know what!”

*Survivor Story #1—Little Herbie*

One survivor, who wishes to be called “Little Herbie,” (hereafter, LH) first met Kenney as a young child. Kenney was a friend of his family and “he always had the monkey.” In middle school, LH’s parents separated. By the time LH began his first year at Creighton Prep, they were divorced. LH felt nervous entering the new high school environment. No one from his junior high was going to Prep with him, and he was already navigating so much that was challenging at home.

Kenney singled LH out for counseling sessions, telling him, “I understand your parents are getting a divorce. It would be good to sit down and talk about it.”

Little Herbie told us that, at first, he welcomed Kenney’s attention and care because, “Dad wasn’t around a lot, Mom was single and very busy at work so I was on my own navigating [life].”

Kenney developed a habit of pulling LH out of class for private counseling sessions. “He would pull me out of class, certain times, or he would ask me to meet right after lunch. He knew my schedule. He knew I was at football practice after school and he would remind me-- ‘hey, do you want to have that session next week?’”

The sessions—conducted in a private room with the door closed—initially struck Little Herbie as “normal” counseling sessions, focused on his transition to high school or his capacity to cope with his parents’ divorce. Because LH had never been to counseling before, or to high school, for that matter, he couldn’t be sure. However, LH felt that something was not quite right as they continued to meet. LH described what adults would identify as grooming and stalking behavior:

---

*[Kenney started] asking more probing questions about what’s going on with my body and what’s happening and asking very specific questions about what goes on at night. In your bed, what do you do? What are you doing? What is developing? What is growing? What is not? Are you touching yourself? And going on and on. I was sitting there thinking, at the time, that this was really uncomfortable, but maybe this is what it was supposed to be? Is he supposed to be asking me about this? [He asked me,] are you talking to your mom about this? What do you do with the sheets? What do you do with your clothes? A lot of those types of things. And I was just like, “This feels weird.” ...*

*The first session was fine, whatever. The second session: okay, I’m not feeling real comfortable. I don’t want to go back, but yet here I am a little bit stuck in his—I would say—“web” because he knew exactly my schedule. He knew exactly where I was going to be at after school. Let’s say after class I would go down a certain hall. He would be at the end of the hall and remind me or talk with me or say, “Hey, we are going to have that session.” After the second and third time I would go different routes because I knew I would be running into him. He knew when I would be always practicing in the gym. He knew how to find me. He would be standing around and reminding me. It became very uncomfortable for me. [. . .] He would always corner me and say, ‘Hey, let’s talk’ [. . .] Everywhere I went, there he would be.*

---

LH remembers his freshman retreat as a time that he felt especially trapped, knowing that he was to spend the night away from home. There was no way to deter Kenney from pulling him out of group sessions for private counseling.



But, really, an average day at school wasn't much better. LH couldn't escape Kenney all year. LH describes, "He knew I didn't drive a car-- I'm 14, 15. He knew I couldn't get away anywhere so I was almost trapped." Kenney told LH not to tell anyone about the counseling sessions. "He always said, 'This is between you and me.'"

LH explained to us how exhausting and stressful it became to spend much time avoiding Kenney:

---

*There wasn't a safe zone [at home]. I was hoping that school would become my safe zone and the damage would still be at home. [. . .]*

*School was good for me because I could sit in class and [focus on schoolwork] and get to basketball practice. But then there would be that time where the bell ring, and I have to watch myself. I have to manipulate myself around in my 4 minutes from getting from this class to the next class because it is becoming uncomfortable. Out of the corner of my eye, I can see him. He's looking at me. He's watching me.*

---

Sophomore year, the sessions continued, though with less frequency. LH remembers beginning to grow in confidence, enough to push back a little against Kenney's sexual probing. A few times, LH said to Kenney, "Why are you asking this? What is going on here?"

Junior year, LH only had to suffer through two sessions. As LH described it, "By then I was already on the Varsity basketball team. I'm now too big of a fish for him. He can go after those freshmen, the vulnerable ones who were still maturing. I was now becoming more physical, more people had their eyes on me, and I don't think it was easy for him to pull me out of class."

Kenney's conduct with Little Herbie did not meet the statutory definition of rape or child sexual abuse, but it does meet the psychological definition of trauma by chronically depriving LH of his sense of safety, personal agency, his privacy, and his ability to learn at school.

Today, especially from his vantage point as a father, LH sees his high school experiences with Kenney as clear boundary violations.

---

*"I tell [my daughters]: if someone touches you, puts a wrong hand on you, or talks to you the wrong way, you come home and tell Dad because we are here to be protectors. [Kenney] looked for people who were unprotected. He knew I was coming in from a public school system. He knew I didn't have a support system around me. He knew my parents were divorced. He already had an 'in' in that he knew my family. He saw an opportunity and he took advantage of-- I look back and say—I was a 14-year-old boy at the time. [. . .]*

---

*This was a bad guy. He was portraying himself as good [. . .] but, he had a sinister side and was very perverted.*

---

LH looks back to his high school formation as mostly a good experience: "[My experience with Kenney] was the only black mark on my entire Prep career. I had a great experience. I loved it. I loved 98% of it-- the teachers, good discipline, the coaching was great, the experience was fantastic." But he can't forget the feeling of being terrorized by Kenney. He still feels it like a "pit in [his] stomach." LH told us, "I don't remember a whole lot of details about all of those classes, but these memories [of Kenney] have remained in here [pointing to his brain] because of the etching of inappropriate behavior and questions during this time in my life [when I] was very moldable."

As LH put it to us, everyone thought in the 1980s that "sexual harassment does not happen in an all-boys school. That's that misconception that it can only happen to a woman. That's wrong. It happens to anyone, anywhere who is vulnerable." LH suggested that, in some ways, the elite, all-male, "high-pressure" environment at Creighton Prep made it harder to discuss what happened to him.

---

*The [positive] relationships I had with the coaches, it was all about sports and participating and performance. It wasn't about, "Hey [Little Herbie], how are you feeling?" You just didn't have feelings. Don't show your feelings, guys. We're getting beat, we don't show them. You gotta*

---

*tough it out. Let's go. We're better than that. And that works with all of the championships [. . .] They win in that department. [But,] they haven't won in the feeling and making people understand [department]. [. . .] They have beautiful facilities. I don't think they have invested in protecting their students.*

---

The constant pressure to perform at Prep created an expectation that “you shouldn’t be falling down in your feelings.”

When we asked LH what kind of practices or policies, if they had been in place during his time at Creighton Prep, would have made a positive impact on his safety and well-being, he noted that increasing the number of mentors available to vulnerable students would have made a difference.

---

*They call it “men for others”? Well, let's bring back some of those alumni men who are very well off and doing great things. Bring them in and say, “We've got a group of dads here. If you do have a problem [. . .] as a student, you can come and talk with one of the dads”—for some of those vulnerable kids. Maybe they can't talk to their own dad, but there are some good dads around.*

---

In LH’s mind, these “dads” wouldn’t just focus on boys’ performance and encourage them to muscle through negative feelings but would be available to talk about difficult emotional matters. It seems that because Kenney was one of the few individuals at Prep who made himself emotionally available to struggling students, vulnerable minors could be persuaded that support from him—however exploitative—was their only option.

LH also argued that the school should inform all students of outside resources for emotional support, such as an externally operated hotline. As LH explained, “You gotta have those outlets because I felt like I was trapped, I was in a web, I had nowhere to go.”

LH made clear to us that his vision of justice in response to his victimization does not center on legal consequences for Kenney or the institutions which supported him. “I don’t want to press charges [

. . .] I just want to add to the story.” LH simply wants the truth to be known and better outcomes for youth in Jesuit institutions moving forward.

### *Survivor Story #2—Ryan*

Another survivor with whom we talked—who wants to be referred to by his real first name, “Ryan”—attended Creighton Prep for just his first year of high school. As Ryan explained to us, “I was pretty much a loner the whole year that I was there.” More athletic kids would have fit in more easily, but Ryan was mediocre at sports and therefore didn’t have a ready-made social circle.

Before Ryan took a health class with Kenney, he already had heard from upperclassmen the buzz: Kenney was “edgy”.

In health class, Kenney talked about sexual issues with the young teens. In particular, Ryan remembers the “lesson” on wet dreams which consisted of Kenney drawing a large penis on the chalkboard. Kenney explained that, over the period of a day or several days, the penis fills up with semen and, eventually, it needed to come out. Though Kenney’s health expertise was not apparent, the fact that he drew a large penis on the board suggested to the 14-year-olds that he was not a typical priest. Other priests might be uptight, but Kenney was “loose”. The class was “enjoyable” and communicated “we’re all guys, we can discuss this.” After this class was over, most of Ryan’s interactions with Kenney were in the hallway.

---

*At first, it was random. [. . .] His thing was he would be in the hallway and [. . .] he asked me if I wanted to go to confession, or just talk, or both. He's like, “Oh yeah, you don't have to go to study hall.” And, you know, pulled me out. [. . .] That was his tool. And he would get me into a private room with him to hang out or to do my confession and talk.*

---

At the beginning, Ryan welcomed the opportunity for a break in his school day, especially if it involved talking with a funny and interesting person like Kenney.

*I thought, “Oh wow. I don’t have to go sit in study hall? I can just hang out with you and talk?” That sounded a lot more fun than having to sit in my desk and not be able to talk or move or anything [. . .] He was exactly the kind of person that I would want to go have a conversation with versus if he was like some of the other priests or brothers that I encountered there-- a lot more rigid or stodgy or something that I would feel would be incredibly boring. I figured-- it seemed entertaining, you know? [. . .] He was the friendliest and most interesting priest that I’d ever encountered up to that point. I don’t think that at my elementary or junior high, there were any other priests that were entertaining or fun like that.*

---

Confession with Kenney was a completely new experience for Ryan. Up until that point, Ryan had only experienced confession in a confessional. But, with Kenney, it was “very relaxed”; just “sitting in chairs in conversation.” Ryan explained, “it was mind-blowing to me a little bit that we can just do it in this room in the high school. Like, this counts as real?” In many ways, this new experience was exciting and hopeful, especially for Ryan, who, at that time, felt otherwise very alone. Ryan thought that perhaps he could experience God in an intimate and meaningful way in a setting like this.

Kenney used this casual style of confession to gain Ryan’s trust and prime him for sexual forms of disclosure. Ryan explained,

*It was very much a conversation. And what he would do is steer it eventually towards asking me questions about how I felt about my body and changes in me. [. . . He kept] steering it towards “you’re going through puberty and changes down there.”*

---

In response to Kenney’s pressured questions, Ryan shared that yes, he was indeed sometimes anxious about whether his penis would look attractive to a future partner. Ryan admitted this because “it was kind of like therapy”; “it felt good” to Ryan to be vulnerable and honest.

Kenney wanted Ryan to show him his penis.

*He said this sometimes helps guys if they’re not confident or sure about what’s down there, then you can just show it to me. I’m familiar with it and I can give you my impression and you can feel better about yourself.*

*The first time, I was like, “No, no. That’s not necessary. I don’t need to do that.” But, he was pressuring me a little bit, like “Oh, I want you to walk over and lock the door because we don’t want anyone walking in and not understanding what’s going on. So, just lock the door and then you can show me and I’ll tell you.” [At that time] I refused. I was like, “No, no. That’s weird. No, thanks.”*

---

But, Kenney didn’t give up. And, Ryan started to feel like he was the one with the problem for saying no to Kenney.

*He’d run into me the hall and say, “Oh Ryan, let’s go do some confession.” And I went and did it. And then, of course, it went towards that same thing [. . .] The second or so time that he was asking me to show him, he said it enough times that it made me feel like I was being unreasonable not to do it.*

*Eventually, it just felt like I was going to give in and do it. So, I walked up and locked the door and then came back and pulled my pants [down] and showed him. [. . .]*

*After that I avoided him like the plague. [. . .] I just knew I didn’t want to be alone with him anymore. He tried several times to come to me in the hallway and [get me to] go into that room. And I always just made up an excuse.*

*I wasn’t going to say anything [to anyone else]. I wasn’t going to challenge him. I was always like, “Oh no, I can’t. You know, I gotta study for my test. I got to do this.”*

---

At the end of the year, when Ryan refused once again to be harangued into confession, Kenney snapped. Kenney attempted to forcibly impose absolution as he stood in the hallway (as if Ryan had just made a confession to Kenney), in front of all of his classmates and other teachers to witness.

Ryan really wasn’t sure what to make of this: “Why would he do all that? I’m in the hallway, I’m trying to get out of school. Everyone’s walk-

ing around. I haven't confessed anything to him in that moment. He's just all of a sudden forgiving me of all my sins." Ryan tried not to think about it too much, telling himself it was just a "close call," since Kenney never touched him. But now, as a father himself, he sees it differently.

---

*The inappropriateness of it is just so much more blaring to me now. [. . .] it is so much more plainly inappropriate. [. . .] Now that I have my own kid [. . . I feel] a lot more anger. Before I used to look at it as a little weird blip in my past. As a parent, as a father, I feel angry that someone is doing that.*

---

In particular, Kenney's request that Ryan lock the door suggests to Ryan, in retrospect, that Kenney had a routinized method of sexual harassment. If Ryan locked the door himself, Ryan would think that he bore the blame for what followed. It would seem like "[Kenney] didn't do anything, he's just sitting there and trying to be helpful."

When Kenney was included in Midwest Jesuits' and the Archdiocese of Omaha's lists of credibly accused priests, Ryan received no communication from Prep. "In my mind, it would have been appropriate for [Prep] to make an effort to [. . .] tell all alumni." This would have felt like confirmation from Prep of the harm he endured and an invitation to share more of his story: "You know, it's not like something that I was going to contact the police [and say] you know, 35 years ago this happened. But I did want to be included [among Prep alumni] as someone who says this happened."

Today, Ryan identifies as an agnostic or an atheist. After his experiences with Kenney, he never attended confession again. Once, when his whole family went to confession together, Ryan pretended to participate, but snuck out of the confessional before the priest could talk with him. He told us, "my experience with Fr. Kenney contributed to my growing evasion of all things church-related. I had lost respect for the sacrament and couldn't force myself to go through the motions of it." During his interview with us, he told us that, if he ever were to choose to participate in a church, he

would choose the Catholic Church. He likes the rituals, the candles, and the incense. He sends his child to a Catholic school, but he is relieved that she won't go to confession since she hasn't done the necessary preliminary sacramental preparation. He knows that part of his responsibility as parent is to warn her about predators like Kenney.

After our interview, Ryan wrote to us to tell us that he started attending church again. He explained,

---

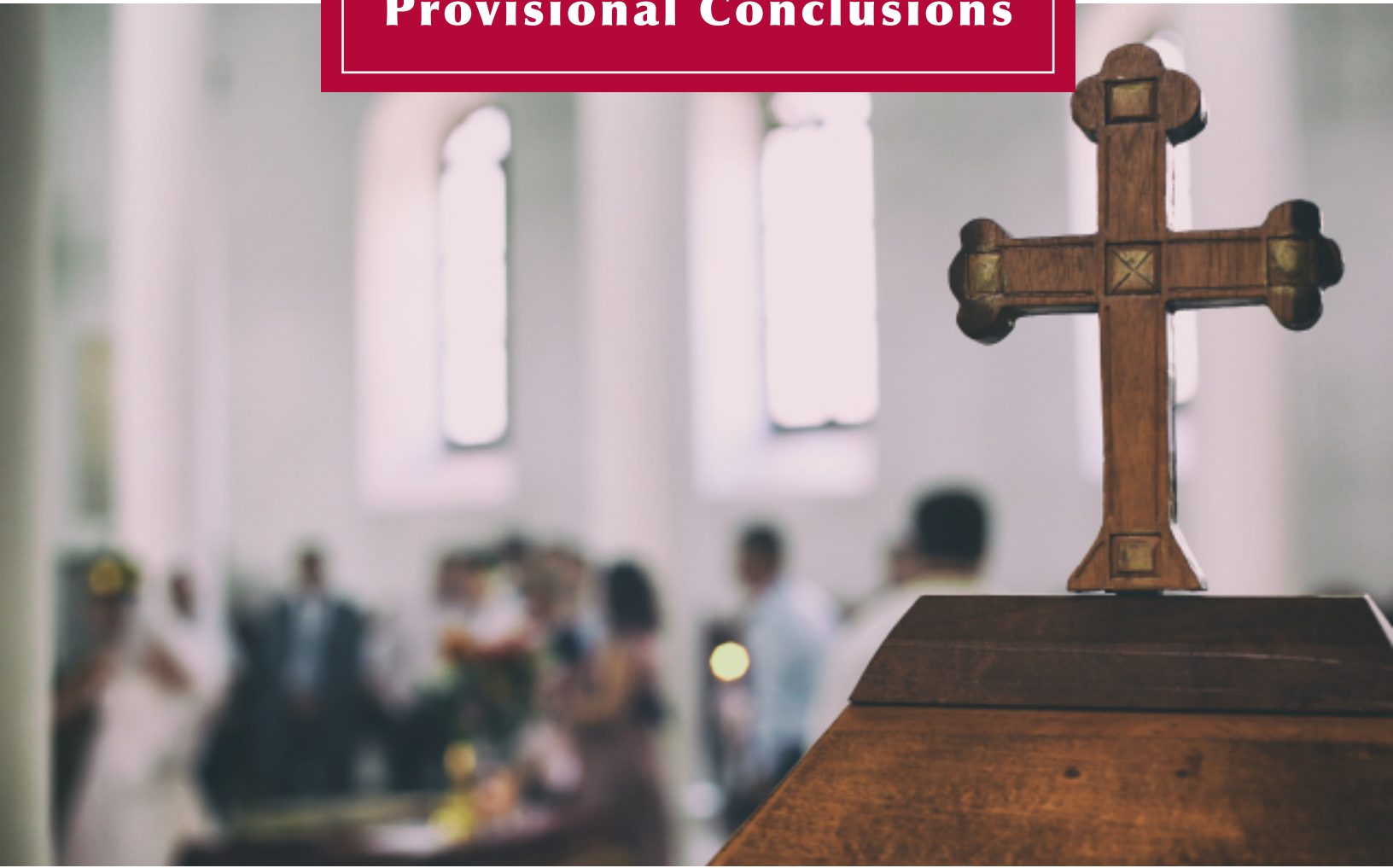
*While it's difficult to reconcile my participation with my agnosticism, I am enjoying the zen-like calmness I feel with the rituals of mass and the nostalgia of my childhood familiarity with it. I think I will attend confession soon as well. I think I can be honest with a priest about my beliefs and I would welcome the insight he may offer me. Without a reexamination of my experience with Fr. Kenney [in our interview], I doubt I would be so willing to go this far.*

---

The experience of having someone listen to his story and affirm his experience opened Ryan to the possibility of reconsidering his participation in the sacraments.



## **Provisional Conclusions**





**OUR RESEARCH UNCOVERED** seven dangerous currents that the Charter and other “post-crisis” initiatives fail to address:

1) ***The potential of abuser networks is unsettling and remains unexplored.*** Through archival research and review of public documents, we found a disturbing fact: During Kenney’s tenure he overlapped with six other Jesuits who were later found to have had credible allegations of abuse. In addition, survivors indicated that there seemed to be at least some knowledge among the Jesuits at the school of others’ behavior. This was illustrated especially in survivors’ recounting of being pulled out of study hall to attend confession with Kenney. As noted by Ryan: “I assume he must have, like told [the proctor/teacher]. I don’t have any memory of him talking to them, but I think I would have been marked absent if he just would have pulled me out and not told someone.”

This knowledge was also indicated in an article printed in the *Omaha World Herald* about Kenney’s abuse, where an alumni told reporter Erin Grace that the dean of discipline at Creighton Prep (who himself was a Jesuit) chastised him for skipping study hall for confession with Kenney. The Dean pointedly asked the student: “Don’t you know better than to hang out with a guy like that?” suggesting a familiarity with his propensity for questionable behavior.<sup>1</sup>

It was difficult for us to follow the thread of potential networks of abusers, as we were limited in our research scope to one specific time and place. But the sheer number of abusers that overlapped with one another, as well as the anecdotal suggestions that Kenney’s behavior was “known” leads us to encourage further research in this area, with attentiveness to what was happening in formation, early assignments and other spaces of overlap.

2) ***An absence of language and practices to construct healthy masculinities at the school seemed to minimize abusive behav-***

***ior.*** Nearly all alumni we spoke with identified the pervasive culture of conventional masculinity at the school. Nearly every boy was expected to play football, and it was not uncommon for teachers and administrators to appeal to narrow masculine norms as tools for instruction and discipline. The perpetrator we studied created space for those who did not “fit” within this masculine ethos, promoting an alternative area where vulnerability was encouraged. Once in the vulnerable space, however, their separateness from the ‘typical’ culture of the school was exploited, increasing their own risk of isolation if they alerted others to their abuse.

3) ***Compartmentalization of clergy sexual abuse within the Church has obscured abuse from secular authorities and community members.*** The Catholic Church’s handling of clergy sexual abuse has demonstrated serious organizational gaps where dioceses and religious orders overlap – including in schools and missions that exist geographically in dioceses but are authorized and facilitated by orders such as the Jesuits. These gaps have allowed abuse and close calls to be obscured, minimizing any incentive to address or attend to these fissures. What’s more, some of these same mechanisms provide cover to institutions to prevent public scandal from damaging the organizational reputation.

The bureaucracy of the Catholic Church, renowned for its apparent comprehensiveness, has shown notable weaknesses in its responses to clergy sexual abuse in the places where dioceses and religious orders have overlap—or gaps—in their duties to act. The result is a latticework of authorities and procedures whose weak spots, paradoxically, strengthen the institution’s defensive posture against critique. Sexual abuse survivors, their advocates, investigators, and researchers encounter weak or absent procedures for accountability, a confusing maze of officials, and both institutional and personal posturing that serves to neutralize potential public outcry that might negatively affect institutions. As such, we argue that the distinct

---

<sup>1</sup> Grace, Erin. 2019, February 25. “Accusers of ex-Creighton Prep priest describe haunting secrets. He asks for proof.” *Omaha World Herald*.



processes for reporting incidents of clergy sexual abuse for religious orders such as the Jesuits increases the risk of harm for potential victims while diminishing the risk of negative public consequences through the ‘shell game’ of responsibility passed between institutions, dioceses, and orders. The result has been that there is little incentive to change or address these problematic and risky processes on behalf of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly, many improvements have been made in identifying problematic behavior, particularly after the Dallas Charter was implemented. However, this has still not addressed the issue that there are separate processes for orders and dioceses regarding abuse allegations, allowing gaps in administrative safeguards to remain. This is illustrated by one interviewee, who outlines the process for the Archdiocese.

*We hear that an accusation has been made and quickly refer to the province. I've heard Jesuit names, Benedictine names, Columban names, and those are quickly referred elsewhere, which seems strange to me that I don't know whether they get a report on action taken by a province, say after [the bishop] has referred it to the province. I think [the bishop] has the authority to say "Nope- that individual no longer has the authority to practice as a priest." But it seems odd that he's willing to give away that particular ... control over that investigation and the outcome.*

It is this very organizational gap that is intimated in the AP's reporting of additional priests in the Illinois attorney general's report that had not been named by the archdiocese: "Attorney General Kwame Raoul's report found 125 additional abusers in the archdiocese, many of them religious order priests whose cases wouldn't necessarily have been handled by the archdiocese but their religious orders....Cupich acknowledged the report laid bare a constant, structural problem in the way the Catholic Church handles abuse cases, with religious orders such as the Jesuits, Francis-

cans, Oblates and Marists often escaping scrutiny and accountability since they, and not the diocesan leadership, keep personnel files. Cupich concurred there was more the Holy See could and should do to bring religious orders into line."<sup>3</sup>

**4) *Practices of profiling can create a false sense of security that priests with especially conservative or progressive politics are immune from perpetrating acts of abuse.***

One of the more common themes we heard from interviewees was that Kenney-- as a well-known, progressive priest who pushed for racial and economic justice-- was thought to be "one of the good guys." At the time he was teaching at Creighton Prep, the Church itself was undergoing turmoil after Vatican II. Indeed, he pushed the school to engage in meaningful service in disadvantaged communities and worked to increase scholarships for boys in these same communities to attend the school. As such, individuals who critiqued his behavior might have been seen as standing in the way of the reforms of Vatican II itself or as obstructing the racial justice for which Kenney worked. As a result, one of the reasons the Midwest Jesuits insulated Kenney from critique (and oversight) may have been in order to defend what they viewed as a vulnerable progressive agenda.

**5) *Practices of "open dialogue" about some aspects of clergy sexual abuse can close off conversation about others.***

It was clear that many believed that the "naming" of credibly accused clergy was the epitome of openness, as this is not legally mandated. However, the willingness of dioceses and orders to name clergy also seems to create a perspective that Church leaders can be responsibly entrusted to control all information surrounding abuse committed by clergy.

The vast majority of Jesuit priests we reached out to refused to speak with us. The primary reasons given for this unwillingness included a vague ref-

2 For more information, see Murray, Rebecca K.; Fryer, Heather and Feder, Julia. (accepted, expected 2025) "The "Swiss Cheese" problem of Religious Orders and Dioceses" *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion: From Cases to Scandals: Sexual Abuse in The Catholic Church*, Vol 16. Céline Béraud and Giuseppe Giordan(eds).

3 Winfield, Nicole. (2023, May 25th). "Chicago cardinal defends compensation plan, urges info on abusers after Illinois abuse report." *The Associated Press*. <https://apnews.com/article/vatican-pope-cupich-cardinal-chicago-abuse-sex-ae387f721771aa9b66668426740af848>

erence to protecting victims' right to privacy, although there was no indication that they knew the names or any identifying information about survivors and would be at risk of disclosing that to us. What was clear from these refusals was that our team was seen as "outsiders" who were "meddling" in an area that was out of bounds to us. Indeed, as researchers who have cumulatively spent decades in Jesuit institutions, and who have by and large had extremely positive relationships with Jesuit priests, we were surprised at the clear stonewalling we received in our efforts. Even more, the consolidation of the provinces and relocation of all archival materials to Saint Louis has had the effect of limiting access to important information located in the archives that might help researchers to better untangle the effects of abuse.

**6) *The harm generated by Kenney's behavior is not limited to the period between 1965-89.*** Even after Kenney was removed from Omaha (in 1989) and, indeed, even after he was removed from public ministry (in 2003), survivors and bystanders continue to wrestle with the enduring effects of his abuse of vulnerable minors.

It is important to note that suffering harm is different than identifying as a victim or a survivor, and this has kept those who were harmed by Kenney's actions in an indirect way from being able to share their story, as they did not feel there was an avenue (or invitation) to do so. However, several of the people we interviewed—even those who were never direct victims of Kenney—talked about the ways in which they were damaged in response to Kenney's actions. They described feelings of disorientation, sadness, and anger. A lack of full transparency from the Midwest Jesuits or from Creighton Prep about consequences for Kenney seemed to exacerbate negative emotions. This was illuminated by some of our interviews:

*"The trauma of abuse has a ripple effect. Parents suffer when their child leaves the Church. Families may have a hard time believing that a priest they liked abused their loved one."*

*"I instantly knew when his name was on that list. I'm like, Oh, my gosh, wow, this is going to hurt a lot of people. He's on that list...I think you're right on this sense of community grief."*

**7) *Legal definitions of abuse do not always capture the breadth of harm committed by abusive priests.*** While it is likely that Kenney's actions violate current criminal codes, our interviews revealed that even those directly harmed by him did not consider legal or even civil remedies for their suffering. And, although victim services offered by the archdiocese of Omaha and the Midwest Jesuits are available regardless of whether litigation is pursued by the survivor, it is unclear how often these resources are sought, especially when survivors find it difficult to make sense of whether what happened to them was simply a "close call" or something more serious than that. Invitations from the school, the archdiocese of Omaha, and the Midwest Jesuits to anyone who has had an experience that they would like to talk about—rather than simply those who are certain that they have a claim to make—would make a big difference in helping to accompany the breadth of individuals who have been harmed and are still in the process of making sense of their experiences. While soliciting stories from people who are don't neatly fit definitions of legal "rape" or "sexual assault" (or who are still making sense of their experiences) might open up the potential for increased reputational risk, it is an important way that Christian organizations—and Jesuit institutions, in particular—can put into practice Ignatian "indifference".<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*, translated by Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola, 1951). Orchard, H. (2019) "Reaching Equipose: The Relationship between Indifference and Discernment in the Spiritual Exercises" *Way*, 58(2), 33–44.

## **Recommendations**



**KENNEY WAS REMOVED** from public ministry in 2003. Kenney's name was released to the public in 2018 as one who was credibly accused of abusing minors. Creighton Preparatory School issued a statement in 2018, naming Kenney specifically, that was sent to "families, alumni and other constituents for which they had an email address." The statement apologized and directed survivors to report incidents of abuse to the president of the high school, law enforcement and the Midwest Jesuits' victim assistance coordinator. Additionally, in the decades since Kenney was removed from Creighton Prep, the school has developed important child safety policies to protect minors from potential sexual abuse. All of these responses have been vital to establish safety for minors and to communicate to survivors that what happened to them was wrong. They are important contributions to an overall sense of transparency about clergy sexual abuse in our communities.

Yet, all but one alumnus we interviewed (including those who maintain a close connection to the school as active donors) did not remember receiving any communication in 2018 about clergy sexual abuse generally or Kenney specifically. They heard about Kenney's abuse through the newspapers or through a friend, rather than from the high school itself. To be clear, it was not that the revelation of Kenney as a perpetrator was unmemorable to these individuals; all could narrate when they had first read about the accusations in the newspaper or the buzz that the initial news created in their peer groups. Furthermore, Prep's statement was never given a permanent, easily accessible place on Prep's website so that alumni who missed the initial communication could later find it. This may be attributed to a desire to protect the school's reputation over making accessible and transparent information.

Relatedly, no one that we interviewed was aware of any consequences that Kenney received. Often it was only through contact with our research team that anyone knew Kenney had been removed from ministry in 2003 or laicized in 2020.

Kenney was removed from ministry 14 years after his removal from Creighton Prep high school for credible allegations of abuse. In the interim, Kenney was placed in ministry positions in South Dakota, among the Lakota tribe, and in Nairobi—both locations where allegations of sexual abuse are historically underreported. Many that we interviewed were "disappointed" that Prep and the Midwest Jesuits didn't "come straight out and confess" in 1989.

Many alumni we interviewed desired more transparency about Kenney's disciplinary process in order to rebuild trust. One interviewee reported,

---

*I wouldn't say that I'm disturbed by the situation with Fr. Kenney, more confused. I don't think that I fully have my arms around it. I don't know the details, and I don't know if I have to know the details. I guess that I would rather know what they are going to do today for the victims and for him and his redemption. If that was to put him in jail, then you put him in jail. But all of those parts are missing. I don't ever know what happened, if the victims got help. And the only thing I really know about Fr. Kenney is that he is up in Milwaukee and he is no longer a priest. So, what else has happened? It had to have been more than that. And, I know that being kicked out the priesthood is a big deal, but I think that there has to be more than that. You get your title taken away and your responsibilities, but what are we doing to prevent him from doing this again?*

---

When we asked how this alum would have felt if Prep had addressed the situation more quickly and with more transparency, he responded,

---

*I would have felt almost a cleansing in saying, "Alright we are going to move forward now. We've done everything that we can for the victim. We've put a fence around the perpetrator and trying to help him. And, anyone that is culpable for the crime has been taken care of." I would feel better if that would have happened. But, it didn't. It is all leaking out here and there.*

---

While Kenney's 2003 removal from ministry was reported in the *Omaha World Herald* in 2018, his laicization happened very quietly in November of 2020. As researchers, pouring over this case

for hours every week, we ourselves almost missed that he had been laicized. And, it is unclear to us whether his laicization was a disciplinary consequence (e.g., Kenney was non-compliant with his safety plan) or a response to a request from Kenney himself. The difference between these two options seemed to matter to those alumni that we have interviewed: as a disciplinary response, it would represent the Jesuits taking seriously the harm that was done to victim-survivors. One interviewee wanted us to recommend that Prep make a public statement to announce Kenney's laicization. As he explained, "We need to know enough to feel that it is being worked on." Nearly everyone that we interviewed had no knowledge of what laicization entails and how it is different from or similar to dismissal from the Society of Jesus. A public statement from Prep could help the public understand some of these terms and move forward with their grief.

For nearly all alumni that we interviewed, their time at Prep was an important and mostly positive part of their early lives. For them, knowledge about Kenney's abuse while a member of the Prep community is "disappointing" and "confounding," but doesn't make them feel like they need to "step away and have no association" with Prep as an adult.

Several alumni we spoke with told us very moving stories about lifelong relationships established at Prep, particularly groups of friends who have gotten together every summer for decades and have supported each other through the best and worst of life, providing genuine accountability and emotional support. There is a "sense of community [there] . . . [it is about] more than just the locker room stuff which we *do* do... we just understand that you want to do something for someone else, but also that your buddies are going to force you to do [good]. They'll say [that] you screwed up with your wife or you screwed up with your kids, you were wrong." In the context of these lifelong friendships, people have disclosed sexual abuse (by other perpetrators) and sexual violence has been a topic of group discussion and an oc-

casional for emotional support. We believe that an institutional context that can generate this kind of friendship, honesty, personal accountability, and mutual support is capable of growing into the kind of place that can thoughtfully acknowledge their own historical institutional shortcomings and can embrace communal forms of accountability. Furthermore, the tradition of Ignatian spirituality provides many resources that can be helpful for taking responsibility for clergy sexual abuse. In what follows, we recommend some concrete ways that Creighton Preparatory School, and similar Jesuit institutions, might take responsibility for clergy sexual abuse and rebuild trust with alumni, current students, and their families.

1) ***Collect all information about clergy sexual abuse at Creighton Preparatory School in one easy to find location on the institution's website, including***

- a. Names of historically affiliated priests who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse;
- b. All communication sent to constituents concerning Kenney (and other priests credibly accused of abusing minors), including any announcements, apologies, and invitations to survivors to report;
- c. A summary of measures taken to protect minors from particular accused priests (i.e., indication of when each priest has been removed from ministry and what other restrictions, if any, have been put in place) and from harm generally (i.e., detailing what institutional policies safeguard minors from exploitation);
- d. Instructions about how to report suspected abuse and/or non-conformity with safeguarding policies (even when they don't result in instances of abuse);
- e. An invitation to report and receive support following any sexually exploitative experience with a priest, even if the individuals who had these experiences are not sure whether they "count" as abuse or not.

2) ***Memorialize clergy sexual abuse.*** This should take two forms:

- a. A liturgy of lament, organized in consultation with alumni survivors of clergy sexual abuse (modeled on the Archdiocesan annual liturgy)
- b. A permanent memorial to survivors of clergy sexual abuse placed in a prominent location, i.e., the campus chapel

3) ***Open institutional records to researchers*** to help to determine the historical reach of clergy sexual misconduct within the institution and the ways in which harm endures in the community. In addition to documenting historical incidents of abuse, it is important to analyze recent “near misses” (places where risk is not properly managed) in order to minimize future opportunities for abuse—think of a warning light that notifies you when you have missed a service appointment for your car and it motivating you to take action before something breaks.<sup>5</sup> In the case of clergy sexual abuse, near misses may be those incidents in which gaps exist in the facilitation of the requirements of the Dallas Charter because of oversight on the part of individual dioceses, orders or schools.<sup>6</sup> To properly manage near misses, it is imperative that gaps be admitted, assessed and addressed. Because these gaps often extend beyond an individual organization (i.e., several schools, or the Jesuit order and the Diocese) hiring risk management or insurance firms, who have a financial interest in protecting institutions, are not enough to adequately address near misses.

Rather, we believe that researchers with a broad perspective, and who are familiar with theoretical underpinnings and appropriate methodology, should become a consistent part of assessment for the Church. Indeed, the Dallas Charter suggests that the Church is ready for this step in Article

16: “Given the extent of the problem of the sexual abuse of minors in our society, we are willing to cooperate with other churches and ecclesial communities, other religious bodies, institutions of learning, and other interested organizations in conducting research in this area”.<sup>7</sup> To date, however, very limited access to data has been given to researchers outside of the John Jay studies (to our knowledge), and our efforts have confirmed the hesitancy to engage researchers at all, for fear of reputational damage. This needs to change. Access to documents (including personnel files) as well as a posture of cooperation with researchers who have undergone rigorous training and have received approval by an Institutional Review Board should be normalized. Indeed, long-term partnerships between researchers and areas where abuse has been present could promote ongoing efforts to adequately address past wrongs, prevent future incidents and create a culture of openness and humility.




---

5 For more information about how this recommendation follows from Normal Accident Theory, see Murray, Rebecca K.; Fryer, Heather and Feder, Julia, “The “Swiss Cheese” problem of Religious Orders and Dioceses” (forthcoming in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion* 2025).

6 Chan, Cristopher and Brenda Scott-Ladd. 2014. “The Judas Within: A Look at the Sexual Abuse Crisis in the Catholic Church.” *Ethics and Behavior*, 24(4): 326–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508422.2013.865525>

7 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) (2002; rev 2011, 2018). “Promise to Protect, Pledge to Heal: Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. Accessed March 25, 2024. <https://www.usccb.org/resources/Charter-for-the-Protection-of-Children-and-Young-People-2018-final%281%29.pdf>