

PART ONE – THE MANDATE FOR THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In June 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) met in Dallas, Texas, and promulgated the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, in order to address the problem of child sexual abuse by Catholic priests. This Charter included a commitment to provide a thorough accounting of the nature and scope of the problem within the Catholic Church in the United States. Through the Charter, the USCCB formed two entities to address the problem of child sexual abuse in the Church: a group of lay Catholics who would comprise the National Review Board and the Office of Child and Youth Protection (OCYP), led by Dr. Kathleen McChesney, who served as executive director. The two groups would share a mandate to investigate and review the prevalence of sexual abuse in the Church, the causes of the abuse, and the procedures for responding to clergy who have been accused of abuse.

To carry out this mandate, the USCCB Charter indicated that two studies would be conducted -- the first to describe the nature and scope of the problem and the second to examine its causes and context. This first study, entitled, "The Nature and Scope of the Problem of Sexual Abuse of Children by Catholic Priests and Deacons within the United States," was commissioned by the National Review Board and funded by the USCCB. The objectives of this study were to collect, organize, and summarize information available in Church files about the sexual abuse of minors (children under 18 years of age) by priests and deacons in the Catholic Church of the United States from 1950 through 2002. Specifically, Article 9 of the Charter states:

The work of the Office for Child and Youth Protection will be assisted and monitored by a Review Board, including parents, appointed by the Conference President and reporting directly to him. The Board will approve the annual report of the implementation of this Charter in each of our dioceses/eparchies, as well as any recommendations that emerge from this review, before the report is submitted to the President of the Conference and published. To understand the problem more fully and to enhance the effectiveness of our future response, the National Review Board will also commission a descriptive study, with the full cooperation of our dioceses/eparchies, of the nature and scope of the problem within the Catholic Church in the United States, including such data as statistics on perpetrators and victims.

In December 2002, Dr. Kathleen McChesney, Director of the OCYP, approached the president of John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Gerald Lynch, Ph.D., to discuss the feasibility of the college conducting the first of the two mandated studies, as established by the Charter. The college was selected because it is a secular institution, with a national reputation in the fields of criminal justice, criminology, and forensic psychology.

President Lynch convened a group of faculty with relevant expertise who met with Dr. Kathleen McChesney and representatives of the USCCB to discuss the framework for the study on the nature and scope of child sexual abuse by priests in the Catholic Church. After a number of discussions, a contract was signed by USCCB and the Research Foundation of the City University of New York on behalf of John Jay College to conduct the study. Funding for the study was provided by the USCCB, with oversight by the National Review Board. The overall purpose of the study was to provide the first-ever, complete accounting, or census, of the number of priests against whom allegations of child sexual abuse were made and of the incidents alleged to have occurred between 1950 and 2002.

To guide the study, Dr. Kathleen McChesney, on behalf of the USCCB, gave the College a specific set of questions to be answered, which defined the scope of the study. The questions focused on four specific areas of concern (see Appendix 1.1a for a complete list of the questions). The first category involved information about the alleged offenses themselves (e.g., the number of allegations, the location in which the behavior is alleged to have occurred). Information about the priests against whom allegations were made was the focus of the second category of questions. These included questions about the age, status and duties at the time of the alleged offense, background information about the priest, whether the Church took action in response to the allegation, and what form that response took. The third category focused on information about those who made the accusations (e.g., their age at the time of the offense, their gender, the time between the offense and the report). Finally, information about the financial impact of these allegations on the dioceses and religious communities was requested.

In response to this mandate, a team of criminologists, forensic psychologists, and methodologists drawn from the John Jay faculty developed three data collection instruments, or surveys (see Appendices 1.1b-e). The surveys were pre-tested, revised, and distributed to each of the 202 United States dioceses and eparchies including missions. The Catholic Church in the United States also includes 221 religious orders of men, formally called Religious Institutes of Men. Many of these groups are divided into provinces and include autonomous cloistered communities, monasteries or abbeys. The religious communities were not mandated to participate in this study. However, the major superiors (leaders of the religious institutes) agreed to participate and sent the survey materials to the individual provinces or communities, where files on individual priests are kept. As a result, survey responses were submitted by three different types of religious communities: by religious institutes; by provinces of religious institutes; and by autonomous monasteries or abbeys. In this report, all three kinds of communities will be referred to as religious communities, to be understood in contrast to the dioceses and eparchies.

The John Jay College faculty developed detailed procedures to ensure complete confidentiality of the survey responders, which are discussed in chapter 1.2. The faculty worked with the USCCB to maximize compliance with the survey by actively responding to questions and developing procedures to ensure that state-level confidentiality laws were not violated by any institution participating in the study. Surveys were returned by 195 of the 202 dioceses and eparchies, which constitutes a 97% compliance rate. Surveys were returned by approximately 60% of religious communities representing 80% of the religious priests in the United States.

The remainder of this report will describe in detail the findings of the study. The next sections of Part One explain in detail the methodology used in this study, the limitations of the study design, and the terminology used. Part Two presents an overview of the findings about the overall number and distribution of allegations. Part Three focuses on the characteristics of the accused priests themselves and Part Four provides details about and circumstances of the allegations. Parts Five and Six discuss the reporting of these allegations and the actions taken by the dioceses and religious communities. Each Part begins by introducing research context for understanding the data, a summary of the findings, and subchapters that give detailed tables of the data. Appendices to each Part contain additional statistical information.

In presenting these findings in as clear, objective, and comprehensive manner as possible, it is the hope of the study team that an accounting of the scope of the problem over the last 52 years will ground future research and reform efforts.