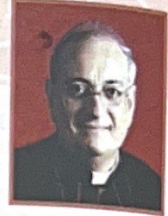


▲ Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio



# Put Out Into the Deep

## A Valuable Tool to Fight Sexual Abuse

*My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,*

On May 18, 2011, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice issued a report titled, "The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010." Commissioned by the National Review Board of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the study was funded largely by the USCCB, and is a ground-breaking study on sexual abuse in any one particular organization.

The National Review Board commissioned the study in the hopes that it would offer insights into how the sexual abuse crisis developed in the Church, so that we could work together and put into place strategies that would prevent such failures in the future.

Most complicated research projects take advantage of the knowledge and expertise of those involved in an area to keep them focused and verify the findings. Because of my own background as a social scientist, I was privileged during the past several years to act as a consultant to the John Jay research team. I do believe that the study was worthwhile and gives us insights into the problem and some idea of how it can be avoided in the future.

A key finding of the study is that the problem of sexual abuse, especially in the Church, had a beginning, a high point, and an end. This is something similar to what could be compared to an epidemic. Strict statistical analysis has been done to verify that truly this is an historical problem, mainly confined to the period of 1965 to 1985.

Another key finding is that the rise of abuse cases in the 1960s and 1970s was influenced by external factors in the broader American culture. The 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 pre-marital sexual behavior and divorce. Unfortunately, it seems that instances in the Church followed the "societal pattern."

Critics of the Church tend to point to clerical celibacy as the primary cause for the abuse crisis. Others have sought to identify homosexuality as the primary culprit for the eruption of abuse in the Church. Given the research, celibacy, which has been a part of the Church for over 1,400 years, was categorically ruled out as a factor that led to abuse. Despite the fact that girls are three times more likely to be abused in the broader culture and

over 80% of victims of priests were male, the John Jay report concluded that this was correlated more closely to the fact that predator priests had access to boys and not girls.

There is no evidence that priests abuse at a higher rate than men in the general population or in another organization. What is disturbing is the finding that "no single psychological developmental or behavioral characteristic distinguishes a priest who abused minors from those who did not." Abusive behavior is highly individualistic and so it is difficult to predict who, indeed, might be an abuser.

Certain preventative factors, however, can mitigate the possibilities of people becoming abusers. Certain vulnerabilities and a combination of situations of stress and opportunities raise the risk of abuse. Clearly, the psychological and spiritual well-being of priests is something that needs greater attention so that any risk of abuse will be mitigated.

One of the difficulties experienced by the researchers is that no other institution has allowed itself to be studied in depth as the Catholic Church has allowed. Therefore, drawing many conclusions was not an easy task. But what was significant is that the rate of abuse within the Church was much lower than any other surrogate organizations or abuse rates that could be found.

In light of some of the aggravating factors that led to abuse, it is not surprising that the study found seminary training focusing on human formation would help resolve the factors that might lead someone to abuse. Human formation and psychological support and supervision have already made a difference.

Yet in the trailing off of any abuse cases in the last 20 years, newer programs of formation have already had a positive impact on any shortcomings that occurred in the past. As awareness of the problem of child sexual abuse surfaced and programs to create a safe environment for children were put into place, the instances of abuse dramatically subsided. The old adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," is certainly true in this case.

Safe environment programs are intended to ensure a heightened awareness of adults and children to the danger of predators. In our own diocese, we require criminal background checks for all Church employees and volunteers. Moreover, we have offered training for 37,000 adults (employees and volunteers). More than 65,000 children in our

schools, religious education programs and other activities are trained each year in a program called "Child Lures."

We must all take seriously our obligation to protect children. No one can neglect his or her responsibility to report child predators to law enforcement officials. I have directed that in every parish of the Diocese in Brooklyn and Queens, the diocesan toll-free number, 1-888-634-4499, be clearly posted and displayed, so that victims or those with knowledge of abuse can report alleged crimes. The reporting is not to any diocesan official, but rather it is to someone outside of the diocese. All allegations are reported directly to the district attorney in the appropriate jurisdiction.

Our Diocesan Review Board is of the highest quality. The Board investigates any claim of abuse and advises me as to the credibility so that appropriate action may be taken.

Lastly, I take this opportunity to thank Sister Ellen Patricia Finn, O.P., our Victims Assistant Coordinator. I am grateful for her compassion in assisting survivors of abuse to find healing and reconciliation when their trust has been so profoundly violated by a clergyman or church worker.

We certainly have passed a sad part of the history of the Church in the United States, as we become aware of abuse situations of children in our own midst. Truly, the John Jay Study was an effort to put out into the deep. At all times, we must be humble and seek the forgiveness of those who have been abused. Certainly, in the name of the Church, I continue to encourage anyone who has been abused to come forward and report that abuse, so appropriate support can be given to the abused and appropriate action taken.

The John Jay Report is available on [www.usccb.org/mr/causes-and-context-of-sexual-abuse-of-minors-by-catholic-priests-in-the-united-states-1950-2010.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/mr/causes-and-context-of-sexual-abuse-of-minors-by-catholic-priests-in-the-united-states-1950-2010.pdf) for your individual reading. Hopefully, this study will further assist the Church in preventing and eradicating any sexual abuse that might occur in the auspices of the Church or by anyone working for the Church.

To read a comprehensive report on how our diocese has responded to this crisis, go to [www.dioceseofbrooklyn.org/uploadedFiles/Hompage/Shadow2Light.pdf](http://www.dioceseofbrooklyn.org/uploadedFiles/Hompage/Shadow2Light.pdf). Please join me in praying for the gift of forgiveness and healing that is so necessary in the lives of Catholics, especially those who have been abused.